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THE CIRCE OF THE DESERTS



Lady Hester Stanhope.

THE CIRCE OF THE DESERTS

BY
PAULE HENRY-BORDEAUX

STANHOPE (LADY H.)

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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THE CIRCE OF THE DESERTS

CHAPTER I

FAREWELL TO ENGLAND

ON February 10, 1810, the frigate *Jason*, commander James King, left Portsmouth, bound for Gibraltar. In the stern of the vessel, a group of four persons watched the coast, which was enveloped in a clinging mist which the meagre English sun could not contrive to absorb, gradually recede into the distance. Three men stood a little apart from a woman whose gigantic stature must not have passed unnoticed, even on British soil.

She was six feet in height and was developed in proportion. Strangers who met her for the first time allowed their astonished and mocking eyes to wander at random and to lose their way over the vast surface which she offered to the admirers of bulk, but when they had succeeded in reaching the face, pale and passionate flower

borne by a robust stalk, they were interested, captivated, subjugated, dazzled ! What wonderful surprise, after the difficult and monotonous ascent of a lofty peak, to discover boundless fields of fresh snow, sparkling with light ! . . .

More strange than beautiful, this woman attracted attention, and those who had gazed upon her features never forgot them. Can one say that the sun is beautiful when its fires blind ? Thus everything about her glittered ; her skin dazzling as marble, of which it possessed the pure grain and the cold smoothness, her eyes of a pale and frosty grey which were illuminated by a terrifying and wild glitter when passion roused her and which was heightened by a bluish ring. . . . Everything about her was striking : her lips, of a dark red, firm and strong in shape, her dazzling teeth, her curved nose, her obstinate chin. A northern light seemed to play on this lofty and superb forehead, on this countenance of a perfect oval, and isolated her in crowning her as a queen . . . or as a madwoman. . . .

What age could she be ? Some thirty years hardly. Perhaps more, for the corners of the mouth, a trifle fallen in, had a wrinkle of bitterness and disenchantment which accused her of being older.

At this moment she was gazing at the north with a singular intensity of expression, and when England had disappeared in its wrappings

of mist, smiling and satisfied she triumphantly wagged her foot ; a foot so long and so arched that a kitten might easily run about on it. . . . She crossed the bridge and went to lean her elbow on the bow of the ship. Had she a presentiment that her departure would be definitive, eternal, and that she would never more behold the green forest trees of Chevening or the fine equipages of Bond Street ?

Lady Hester Stanhope was born on March 12, 1776, of the marriage of Hester, sister of William Pitt, with Charles, Lord Mahon, afterwards third Earl Stanhope, the frenzied Republican. Her ancestors, both paternal and maternal, were not ordinary people. Her grandfather, Lord Chatham, had, by the side of his great intellectual faculties, the detestable mania of enveloping the most anodyne acts of life with an impenetrable mystery which kept all his entourage on the alert and in suspense. Had he not one day when he was unwell, refused to receive a man, the bearer of urgent news, who insisted on seeing him immediately ? After long discussions, the messenger contrived to be introduced into the Minister's room ; but the room was darkened and the Minister invisible behind a rampart of screens. New battle to succeed in catching sight of Lord Chatham. At last, when the man had by main force gained this honour, he drew from his pocket a parchment containing the

title-deeds of two estates with a rent-roll of £14,000, bequeathed by Sir Edward Pynsent as a proof of his admiration. The property had nearly escaped him. Lady Hester Stanhope, if she did not inherit Burton Pynsent, inherited, at any rate, all these eccentricities of character.

As for her other grandfather, he was that second Earl Stanhope who had forbidden his son to powder his hair on the occasion of his presentation at Court, "because," he pretended, "wheat was too dear." So that Lord Mahon went quite simply into the presence of the King with his natural head of hair, that is to say, black as coal and lightened by a white plume, which caused the spiteful tongue of Horace Walpole to remark that "he had been tarred and feathered."

This misadventure did not prevent the young man from marrying, the same year, Lady Hester Pitt. The great Chatham entertained the highest opinion of his son-in-law.

"The exterior is pleasing," wrote he to Mr. James Grenville, "but it is in looking within that one finds invaluable treasures, a head to imagine, a heart to conceive and an arm to execute all that he can have there which is good, amiable and of good report."

By this marriage, he had three daughters: the extraordinary Hester, Griselda and Lucy Rachel. Left a widower five years later, he

contracted a second marriage, with Louisa Grenville, by whom he had three children : Philip Henry ; Charles, who was killed at Coruña ; and James Hamilton, inspired no doubt by the spirit of equity, for he was a thorough Republican.

Grave political differences which arose from 1784 between Stanhope and Pitt sensibly cooled their friendship. The French Revolution separated them entirely. Lord Stanhope threw himself with ardour into the Opposition, through conviction at first, and then because he hated the victorious party, merely because it was the victorious party. He loved to act with a little minority, and, this tendency continually increasing, earned him in the House of Lords the surname of " the Minority of One."

From his childhood at Geneva he had preserved the taste for the exact sciences, and he attached his name to several scientific discoveries, of which the most astonishing was that of steam navigation. His children alone did not interest him. Lady Hester Stanhope, who inherited from him her love of independence and the uncompromising nature of her ideas, played the very devil, terrorising her governesses. From 1800 to 1803 she lived with the old Lady Chatham at Burton Pynsent, of illustrious memory, and her skill in protecting her brothers and sisters from the paternal experiments having attracted

the attention of her uncle, William Pitt, he asked her to come and keep house for him. She was then twenty-seven.

This singular young girl, down to the death of the "Great Commoner" in January, 1806, was truly his confidante, his secretary, his right arm. Remarkably intelligent, bold and original, she played the part of a second Prime Minister. Pensions, titles, favours passed through her hands. Thrown back brusquely into the shade, after her uncle's death, she was unable to endure the tameness of an ordinary life. After some years of solitude in Wales, disgusted with the world and politics, she resolved to leave this England which was too prompt to forget.

Of the three men who had embarked with her on the *Jason*, one was her brother, James Hamilton Stanhope, captain in the 1st Foot Guards, who was going to rejoin his regiment at Cadiz; another, a friend, Mr. Nassau Sutton; and the last, a young doctor, Charles Meryon, who, instead of growing musty in the lecture-rooms of Oxford, was departing joyously for milder climes.

Between two showers—they were numerous!—Lady Hester Stanhope came and sat down on the bridge. She would have wished to forget; she would have wished to break with the past, at once too beautiful and too sad; but recollections rolled in upon her, countless invading

waves which moaned and beat against the shores of her soul.

What had she left behind her which was worthy of regrets? Two sisters with whom she had never been in the least intimate, an insignificant brother, an old maniac father, altogether mad and democrat besides, which is the worst of mental aberrations. Singular old fellow truly, who slept, *in winter*, with wide-open windows!

Lady Hester reviewed the sad days of her neglected childhood. Her stepmother was an insipid creature, without interest in anything, who divided her time—Oh! in a very equal way—between her toilet-table and her box at the Opera. And during this time, Lord Stanhope hurried from his iron hand-press to his factory for making artificial tiles to exclude the snow and the rain, sprang to his reckoning-machine, from there rushed to his dockyard, where a steamboat was always on the look-out and always refused to move, entered, on the way, the Old Jewry, where some members of the Revolution Society were ready to submit to a speech, and drew up in return a motion to be brought forward in the House of Lords in order to prevent England from interfering in the internal government of France! . . . One childish recollection haunted Lady Hester until she was tired.

The scene? A London street transformed

into a sea of mud by an unusually mild winter. The personages ? A little girl perched on enormous stilts and very much at her ease up there, to be sure ! An old gentleman, tall and spare, leaning out of a window, using forcible language and gesticulating. The little girl went up to the first floor. Earl Stanhope was in a good temper that morning ; after having dispersed his gold and silver plate and his tapestries, which exhaled a too aristocratic mustiness, he had just sold off his horses and carriages. With his bare feet thrust into slippers, and wearing under his dressing-gown his beloved silk breeches which never left him day or night, he was contentedly munching the piece of brown bread which with him took the place of breakfast.

“ Well, little girl,” was his greeting ; “ what is it that you want to say ? On what devil had you climbed just now ? ”

“ Oh, papa ! Since you have no more horses, I wanted to practise walking in the mud with stilts. Mud, you know, is all the same to me ; it is that poor Lady Stanhope who will find it trying ; she is accustomed to her carriage, and her health is not first-rate.”

“ What is that you say, little girl ? What would you say if I bought a carriage for Lady Stanhope ? ”

“ Well, papa, I should say that it is very amiable of you.”

“ Well, well, we will see. But, by all the devils, no armorial bearings ! ”

Hester revived the scene with a distinctness which distance strengthened. She recalled even the carriage which Lady Stanhope had owed to the famous stilts ; for her astonishing memory, like that of her grandfather, Lord Chatham, forgot neither things, nor animals nor people.

Memories rolled in upon her still. Willingly, Hester paused longer over those which had been proud or pleasant hours. She conjured up delightful evenings in London. Was it indeed she who was attending it seemed but yesterday the Duchess of Rutland’s ball ?

Before leaving Downing Street, she had gone to find her uncle, William Pitt, in his study. While he was finishing the signing of a paper, she arranged before a mirror the folds of her gown, of white satin draped in the antique fashion which blended with her snow-white shoulders. Suddenly she perceived that the Minister’s attentive eye was following her movements.

“ Really, Hester,” said he, “ you are going to make conquests this evening, but would it be too presumptuous to suggest to you that this fold ought to be caught up by a loop ? There ! like this. What do you think about it ? ”

And his taste was so delicate, that he had found instinctively what was required to complete the classic form of the drapery.

What a crowd at the duchess's ! The heads all touched one another like the necks of bottles emerging from a basket.

And what long faces !

Ah ! it is that English society was prodigiously bored. Boredom, that pastime of old peoples rotted by civilisation, reigned as master and triumphed hardly over the conventions. The French *émigrés* had brought with them, in the perfume of their yellowed lace and in the flash of their last jewels, the precious remains of a frivolity and of a grace which were at the point of death. The spirit of France had been for the lymphatic coldness of the English what condiments are for boiled beef : a stimulant to the appetite. Scandal was on the watch and morals were dissolute. But the wits of these haughty ladies had been sharpened, and all their intrigues were carried on slyly, clandestinely. Against the rigid and narrow Puritanism, against the redoubtable spirit of cant, imagination and fancy struggled without hope of victory. The façade, that was what mattered ! So much the worse if the interior of the building were used as a stable. Only, hypocrisy being like the veronal which prolongs the torpor of surfeited and jaded societies, England continued to govern royally. Extravagance and dandyism were required to cheer her up. And how welcome on the occasion of some dreary social function was

the arrival of a Hester Stanhope or of a George Brummel !

Lady Hester recalled her entry into the ball-room with Lord Camelford, her beloved cousin—a true Pitt, that man ! And what an entry. Both were of extraordinary stature ; the women had not enough smiles for him, the men not enough eyes for her. A long flattering murmur accompanied them.

“ Have you seen Lord Camelford ? ” twittered the ladies. “ Well, it appears that he blew out the brains of his lieutenant one day that a mutiny threatened to break out aboard his ship, and that quite coolly, just as I am speaking to you.”

“ Oh ! my dear, you make me shiver.”

“ Yes, my dear, he frequents the taverns in the City, disguised as a sailor, and when he meets some poor devil whose face he recollects, he makes him tell him his history, thrusts a hundred pounds into his hand and threatens to thrash him if he presumes to ask him his name ! ”

“ Have you seen Lady Hester Stanhope ? She caused a scandal at the last Court ball. No, really ! You have not heard people talking about it ? It is shocking, my dear ! Would you believe that Lord Abercorn, having vainly solicited from Pitt the Order of the Garter, turned towards Addington (the surgeon’s son ; yes, exactly) to obtain it ? Lady Hester, having learned of the

matter, flew into a furious rage. Talking with the Duke of Cumberland—it is from the duke himself that I have the story, she said :

“ ‘After the innumerable favours which Lord Abercorn has received from Mr. Pitt, to go over to Mr. Addington ! Ah ! I will make him pay dearly for his defection.’ ”

“ ‘Here is your opportunity, then,’ exclaimed the duke, ‘he has just come in. Go for him, little bulldog !’ ”

“Forthwith Lady Hester pounced upon Addington, and, fixing her eyes on his Garter, said :

“ ‘What have you there, my lord ?’ (You will recollect that Lord Abercorn has had both his legs broken.) ‘What have you there ?’ A bandage ? Mr. Addington has done his work well, and I hope that in future you will be able to walk more easily.”

“ Oh ! it is insufferable ! ”

“ Oh ! my dear, here is something much better ! The other day, Lord Mulgrave, while breakfasting with Mr. Pitt, found beside his plate a broken spoon.

“ ‘How can Mr. Pitt keep such spoons ?’ he had the bad taste to say to Lady Hester.

“ ‘Have you not yet discovered,’ she replied, ‘that Mr. Pitt often uses slight and weak instruments to effect his ends ?’ ”

“What a pest she must be, dear creature ! Lord Mulgrave ! A wonderful statesman ! ”

And even those who detested her were the first to bow and scrape and join the crowd of admirers who surged in her wake.

“Lady Hester! I distinguished the pearls of your necklace more than five yards away!”

“Lady Hester! you are astonishing this evening!” And suchlike banalities. And what heat! All the rouge and all the powder were melting. Lady Hester endeavoured in vain to reach a balcony. Cries, exclamations, confusion. The Duke of Cumberland’s voice rose above the orchestra.

“Where is Lady Hester? where is my little aide-de-camp? Let her come and help me to get out of this inferno; I see nothing of her, and I cannot get out alone. Ah! where has she gone? Where has she gone?”

The Duke of Buckingham hurried away to fetch him a water-ice to save him the trouble of moving.

Who are these crossing the gallery of mirrors? Oh! they could be none but Lady Charlotte Bury and her brother, no one walked as they did; it was enchanting to watch them. What a beautiful woman, truly! What arms! What a hand! One evening when she was entering her box at the Opera, had not the entire house turned to admire her?

The Grassini was beginning to sing in a relative silence. The previous week, the Duchess of Devonshire had had Mrs. Billington, soprano

against contralto; the worldly rivalries were continued in music. . . .

In the great drawing-room, skilfully illuminated, for the Duchess of Rutland was too much of a Beaufort by race to leave in the shadow the pretty curve of her profile, the regular beauty of her features, the softness of her long eyelashes, there was a basket of living flowers. The Marchioness of Salisbury, who possessed the piquant charm which belongs to Frenchwomen, and who was slipping on her gloves with supple gestures, quite natural to her, in the prettiest manner imaginable, the Countess of Mansfield, Lady Stafford, the Countess of Glendore, so aristocratic in her demeanour, Lady Sage and Sele, the Countess of Derby, painted by Lawrence when she was still the actress Elisa Farren, and that charming Lady Duncombe, that romantic blonde who had inspired John Hoppner's masterpiece, and the Viscountess Andover, and the Viscountess of St. Asaph and so many others, with their pretty airs or their beautiful faces, their loose tresses, their tall statures, their bosoms rising and falling and their gowns of Indian muslin which revealed the outline of their bodies at the slightest movement—so many others who had posed carelessly, and as if to amuse themselves, before Lawrence, painter of adored women, before Romney or before the miniaturist Cosway.

Earl Grosvenor was talking in the embrasure of a door with the beautiful Lady Stafford. Lord Rivers, the Duke of Dorset, the Duke of Richmond, Lord Mulgrave fluttered about the Duchess of Devonshire. Perhaps they were making her guess at the last riddle of Fox, and the most true of English riddles : “ My first denotes affliction which my second is destined to experience ; my whole is the best antidote to soothe and cure this grief ! ” Perhaps also they were murmuring to her the verses which Southey had written in response to her praising William Tell :

Oh ! lady nursed in pomp and pleasure
Where learnt thou that heroic measure ?

Despite the advancing years, Georgina Spencer had remained “ the irresistible Queen of the Mode,” the beautiful lady, the exquisite *grande dame*, artistic, refined, adventurous, who had served as model to the two great English painters of the eighteenth century. With her nose *à la Roxelane*, her bewitching eyes, her wealth of auburn hair, with that dazzling carnation of the races of the North, that divine mouth which had snatched from Gainsborough a confession of powerlessness : “ Your Grace is too difficult for me ! ” and which had made him throw his brush filled with colours on the damp canvas, she possessed still a unique grace, a reputation for cajolery which exasperated Lady Hester

Stanhope. She considered that, when she was not smiling, her expression was satanic, and treated her affability as affectation. She knew so well how to cast her nets over the young men whom she needed for her little receptions ! Her sister, Lady Bessborough, was ten times more intelligent. But fame inclines always towards splendid horses, fine carriages, great personages, rumour and sensation.

Lady Liverpool arrived naturally late, for Lord Liverpool was finishing his toilette as he came in. She entered the drawing-room with an inimitable ease of manner, cleaving her way like a beautiful swan through the crowd of guests, smiling to the right, inclining her head to the left, speaking to this one, inquiring after the health of that, saying an amiable word to all. But she was a Hervey, and all the world knew that God had created men, women and Herveys.

The Prince of Wales, who was still, despite his forty years and more, one of the handsomest men in the three kingdoms, with the soul the most ugly and the most vile, had condescended to come and relate to everyone who was willing to listen to him that the King was madder than ever. But Brummel had not yet put in an appearance.

It was whispered that the Prince, to the great despair of the Queen, had had himself painted

full length and in uniform by Madam Vigée-Lebrun, while she was staying in London. Well-informed people added that he intended to give this portrait to Mrs. Fitz-Herbert, his former mistress, as a belated testimony of gratitude for all the errors which she had prevented him from committing. "Do not send this letter to such and such a person; she is careless and will leave it about." "You have been drinking all night; hold your tongue!" In this fashion had she been accustomed to address him.

This young widow, very pushful, whose profile and figure recalled those of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, would have been very willing to marry a prince just as Anne Lutterel had married the Duke of Cumberland. But then the Royal Marriage Act, and the religious ceremony of December 21, 1785, had never been recognised.

William Pitt, thin, lank, haughty and awkward-looking, with his head held high and thrown back, was looking fixedly at the ceiling, as though seeking his ideas in the air. One could not depend on that, however, for he took note of everything which happened, and discovered here a shoulder too high, there an imperfect figure under the deceitful drapery, there again a thick ankle.

"Lady Hester, do you not see Lord C . . . ? He is bowing to you."

“I see down there a great pigeon-chested chameleon. Is that Lord C . . . ?”

Camelford, who had heard the answer, made vain efforts to preserve his gravity. The unfortunate man had been driven on to the corner of a sofa by a countess, a little *passée*, who, presently, when he will have fled, tired out, will sing his praises, will shout them rather: “Such delightful manners! Wonderful conversational powers! Charming! Irresistible! Fascinating!”

The heat, continually increasing, was altering, turning pale and distorting the faces of all the company, just as if they were moulded in soft and tepid wax. In proportion as the evening advanced, the favourable impressions which the women had created were discounted. Then Brummel made his appearance. He wore a coat of some softened colour, the material of which had been rasped all over with a piece of sharpened glass, an aerial coat, a coat of lace-work. . . . The gloves he wore were transparent, which moulded his fingers and showed the contour of the nails as well as the flesh—gloves which had necessitated the coalition of four artists, three for the hand, one for the thumb. . . .

And all that without self-consciousness, with a cold languidness, an ease of bearing, a simplicity! But excess of refinement!—does it not often rejoin the natural?

With him there entered an invigorating breath, an unexpected attraction, a new pungency which acted like a tonic upon pleasures which had grown anæmic. The orchestra became more animated, the women more desirable, the men, already three-parts intoxicated by the alcohol they had consumed, less wearisome.

Meanwhile, without hurrying himself, Brummel threaded his way through the rooms. Amongst all those proud ladies, how many had contrived their toilettes, chosen with more care the diamonds which adorned their coiffures and the flowers of their corsages, in the hope of attracting his attention? A duchess told her daughter quite loudly to be careful of her manners, of her gestures and of her answers, if by chance Brummel condescended to speak to her.

And, nevertheless, he was not handsome, in the strict sense of the word. His hair was inclined to be red, and his profile, though of Grecian type, had been spoiled by a fall from his horse, when he was still serving in the 10th Hussars, under the orders of the Prince of Wales. But the expression of his face was more to be admired than his features, the skill of his attitudes more perfect than his body. And, above all, he was irony and impertinence personified. And women, who are sometimes insensible to flattery and endearments, are never so to disdain and wounds inflicted on their vanity. And those

who were the most infatuated with "primosity," that exquisite word created by the Pitts to characterise the solemn, stiff, bashful spirit of Cant, and which might have deserved the definition which Pope gave of prudery :

What is prudery ? 'Tis a beldam
Seen with wit and beauty seldom

did not pardon him for not having asked them for what they would have refused him. More of a dandy than the Prince of Wales, he had not attached himself to Mrs. Fitz-Herbert, Benina, as he had surnamed her one evening.

His eyes, unreadable and incredibly penetrating, roamed, slowly and without seeing anything, over the rooms in which the most beautiful women in London were gathered. With an icy indifference, his distant glances skimmed the faces, without recognising them, without settling anywhere.

"Where shall I find a woman who knows how to dance without breaking my back ?" spoke the magnificent voice at last. "Ah ! here is Catherine (the sister of the Duke of Rutland), and I think she will suit my purpose."

But, catching sight of Lady Hester, he gave the duke's sister the slip and came towards her. Raising the ear-rings which concealed the beautiful and graceful collar which encircled her neck, he exclaimed :

“For the love of God, let me see what is under there !”

Pitt's niece and the king of the dandies had a keen appreciation of each other's qualities. They were both of them without rivals in showing the grotesque sides hidden in all men, without rivals in stripping and publicly castigating the puppets who governed England, without rivals in compelling them to unmask themselves their dirty little tricks, their villainous hypocrisies, their bad faith, their monstrous absurdities, just as exhibitors of trained animals make their monkeys parade and dance.

Having passed judgment on the ball—Brummel's praise or blame was everything at that time—or by a silence more eloquent, he went to Watier's Club, followed by Lord Petersham, Lord Somerset, Charles Ker and Robert and Charles Manners, famous Macaronis gravitating around their star.

In the carriage which took them back to Downing Street, Pitt said to his niece :

“Really, Hester, Lord Hertford has paid you so many compliments this evening that you ought to be proud of them.”

“Not at all,” she answered. “Lord Hertford is deceived if he thinks that I am beautiful. Take each feature of my face separately and put them on the table ; not one of them will bear examination. Put them together and illu-

minated, they are not bad. It is a homogeneous ugliness, nothing more."

A slight roll was disturbing the *Jason*. Lady Hester, lost in her thoughts, remained leaning against the netting. She recalled to mind some of those mordant sallies which had crucified her victims. Pitt had decided to create an Order of Merit; England was at this time in the thick of the war against France. Lord Liverpool was entrusted with the task of deciding on the colours of the decoration; and one evening he entered the Prime Minister's drawing-room, quite proud of himself and brandishing a tricolour ribbon.

"See," cried he, "how I have succeeded in combining colours which will flatter the natural pride: red is the British flag; blue is the symbol of liberty; white, the symbol of loyalty."

All present expressed their admiration.

"Perfect! Excellent! The King will be pleased!" they exclaimed.

"I am sure of it," remarked Lady Hester, "but it seems to me that I have seen that combination of colours somewhere!"

"Where was it?" inquired Liverpool, taken aback.

"Well, on the cockades of the French soldiers!"

"What ought to be done, Lady Hester? I have ordered five hundred yards of it. What use can I make of it?"

“To keep up your breeches, my lord, when you put papers there which you never find and which you look for at the bottom of one pocket, then at the bottom of another, like an eel at the bottom of a fish-pond. I am always afraid that some misfortune will happen to your breeches !”

And when Addington (the duchess's son still) had had the fancy to have himself created Lord Raleigh, she had conceived a pretty caricature. Her uncle, Pitt, played the part of Queen Elizabeth, dancing a minuet with his nose in the air ; Addington, as Sir Walter Raleigh, made his obeisance ; and the King wore the costume of a Court jester ! Pitt, after indulging in roars of laughter over this description, had despatched a dozen emissaries to all parts of London to secure, no matter at what cost, the famous caricature, which only existed in Lady Hester's imagination. And there was no Lord Raleigh !

And the delicious scenes in which she caused the entire Court to pass in review, those scenes of which she was at once author, actor and costumer. With her the talent of imitation amounted wellnigh to genius. She mimicked the women who were the leaders of the fashionable world, or who had been its leaders, such as the Duchess of Devonshire : “Fu ! Fu ! Fuh ! what shall I do, my dear. Oh, dear ! how frightened I am !” She mimicked the duchess's visit to the Foreign Office to demand back a

note which she had sent to someone there. Perceiving a shabby little clerk, she said to him :

“ Would you be so good, sir, as to have the kindness to give me back that note ? I am sure that you are such a perfect gentleman ! . . . ”

Then, turning towards the person who had accompanied her, the duchess exclaimed :

“ What fine eyes ! Don’t you think so ? He is a handsome man, is he not ? ” Just as if the staff of the Foreign Office did not understand French !

Lady Hester made game also of the sentimental couples dear to Kotzebue. With her hand on her heart, rolling her blue eyes, she aped the amorous transports of the newly married, representing in a second tableau, not less successful, the mistresses of the one and the lovers of the other.

And the pleasant evenings when she was alone with William Pitt. The logs blazed joyously. The lamps were low. What wonderful hours, for ever fled, she had passed thus during nearly three years ! . . .

She heard William Pitt’s clear voice. He was complaining of Canning, so elusive, so unstable, so false. Lady Hester protested mildly.

“ Perhaps he is thus merely in appearance, uncle,” said she, “ and only sacrifices his opinions ostensibly in order to strengthen your reputation.”

“ I have lived for twenty-five years, my child, in the midst of men of every kind, and I have found only one human being capable of such a sacrifice.”

“ Who can that be ? Is it the Duke of Richmond ? Is it such or such a person ? ”

“ No, it is you ! ” . . .

Hester plunged further into her reveries. Dear Uncle William ! How he loved her ! It seemed but yesterday evening that he said to her : “ Little one, I have many good diplomatists who understand nothing of military operations, and I have many good officers who understand not a jot about diplomatic negotiations. If you were a man, Hester, I would send you on the Continent with sixty thousand men and I would give you *carte blanche*. And I am sure that all my plans would be executed and that all the soldiers would have their shoes blacked.”

Lady Hester recalled the promenades on the old feudal terrace of Windsor Castle. The King was there. All the princes and princesses revolved about him. All at once, the King stopped and, addressing himself to Pitt, said :

“ Pitt, I have found a Minister to replace you.”

Mr. Pitt immediately replied :

“ I am happy that Your Majesty has found someone to relieve me of the burden of affairs ; a little rest and fresh air will do me good.”

The King continued as if he were concluding his sentence and had heard nothing :

“ A Minister better than you.”

“ Your Majesty’s choice cannot be other than excellent,” replied Pitt, surprised.

The King resumed :

“ I say, then, Pitt, that I have found a better Minister and, further, a very good general.”

Those present began to smile and to scoff stealthily at the King’s favourite. Pitt, notwithstanding his experience of the Court, felt ill at ease.

“ Sir, will you condescend to tell me,” said he, “ who is this remarkable person to whom I render the homage due to his great talent and the choice of Your Majesty ? ”

The King would show him who it was : Lady Hester on her uncle’s arm !

“ Here is my new Minister,” he exclaimed. “ There is no person in the kingdom who is a better statesman than Lady Hester, and, I have great pleasure also in declaring, there is no woman who does more honour to her sex. You have no reason to be proud of yourself, Mr. Pitt, for there have been many Ministers before you and there will be many after you. But you have reason to be proud of her, for she unites all that is great in man and in woman.”

Still standing on the bridge of the ship, insensible to the wind and the cold, Lady Hester

recalled the painful circumstances which had accompanied the death of William Pitt. How he had lain emaciated and enfeebled in his room at Putney Hall, but always so full of hope, so confident in the approaching cure. And in less than a week afterwards he was resting on his death-bed. They enter, the latch is pushed, the door is open ; the familiar footsteps no longer echo on the flagstones of the deserted corridors ; the house is empty, the friends have fled, the servants are far away, the crowd of courtiers who used to besiege the porter's lodge dispersed, vanished, disappeared ! It seemed to Lady Hester that she was again alone with her uncle for the last time. Then she had experienced the desertion of those who, only the day before, had been the most faithful. For twenty years he had spent himself body and soul for the good of the country ; he had worn out his health ; neglected his fortune, employed his credit on behalf of others ; and he had received, as a last recompense, the approving sneers of those who listened to Canning criticising and disparaging his policy and exclaiming : " That is Pitt's glorious system ! " And all the newspapers reflected : " That is Pitt's glorious system ! " Hounds rushing on the quarry fearing lest they should lose a bite.

Rise at an early hour, receive fifty persons, eat in haste or do not eat at all, hurry to Windsor Castle, hurry to the House, tire our your lungs

until three in the morning. Scarcely have you returned home than Mr. Adams arrives with a paper, then Mr. Long with another. Go to bed then—rat-tat-tat, a despatch from Lord Melville, “On His Majesty’s service.” Sleep—rat-tat-tat, thirty persons are waiting at the door.

Lady Hester recalled the little house in Montague Square, where she had gone to hide her grief. To have been everything and to have been only that ! To make and unmake Ministers, to distribute pensions, to mimic the courtiers, to be insolent towards some, ironical towards others, to move surrounded by a troupe of envious persons wreathed in smiles, of ambitious persons bowing and scraping unceasingly, of fools gaping with admiration, to humble the vainglorious, to unmask the hypocrites. To be more than Minister.

She had known the pleasure of exercising authority without control, of commanding with the certainty of being obeyed ; she had had the halo of fame without having its reverses, and then on a sudden she was no longer anything. Nothingness. Had she need of a shilling ? Every purse was closed. Naturally, no more horses or carriages. Were she to ride in a hackney-coach. There was always some charitable soul to say : “Whom do you think I have met in a hackney-coach this afternoon ?” . . . Did she go on foot. . . . There were always well-inten-

tioned persons to insinuate that Lady Hester Stanhope did not walk alone for nothing. . . .

Did she meet a friend and walk a few steps with him, immediately all the neighbourhood was twittering :

“ Have you seen Lady Hester Stanhope crossing Hanover Square with such and such a person ? I wonder where they went.” . . . Confined in the pillory, she was obliged, without hope of revenge, to endure the insults of those at whom she had imprudently scoffed when intoxicated with power. And they were so much the more to be feared since they were enticed by the certainty of impunity. Men, like animals, soon become vicious when they know they are the stronger. She fled from London, and her little cottage at Builth, in Wales, was invaded in its turn by all that clique of people who make it their business to gloat over the misfortunes of others.

Charles, her favourite brother, and General Sir John Moore, the only man, except Camelford, who had ever touched her heart, were both dead. In the garden of her hopes there was nothing but tombs. What was there to stand in the way of her leaving England ?

Long before the man in the crow's-nest had shouted : “ Land to starboard ! ” Lady Hester's piercing eyes had made out a rocky point. It was Cap Finistère—France !

France! Her uncle Pitt had been there once, once only, between two Parliamentary sessions. It was in the autumn of 1783. After a stay at Rheims, at the time of the vintage, he had spent some days in Paris. The King was at Fontainebleau and all the fashionable world far from the capital, "with the exception of the English, who had the air of being in possession of the town." He visited the monuments, attended the Comédie-Française, followed a stag-hunt, appeared full of gaiety and animation, although he became a little bored when people talked to him of Parliamentary reform, and attracted the notice of all the distinguished people, beginning with Queen Marie Antoinette.

But that M. and Madame Necker should have offered him their daughter, with an income of £14,000, was laughable. How, imbued with the Swiss ideas on domestic happiness, could they have dared to throw their daughter Germaine at the head of a foreigner whom they had known scarcely a few days? In any case, Pitt's theatrical reply: "I have already wedded my country," is nonsense. He was much more direct and, above all, much more sarcastic, the dear uncle!

The night fell; a mauve twilight blended with the coasts of France. Lady Hester bent her head. She saw again a little girl seven or eight years old who, furtively, throwing anxious glances to either side, unfastened a boat made fast to

the beach at Hastings, raised the mooring-ring, grasped the oar with a sure hand and made for the open sea. This little girl, whose head had been turned by the visit which the Comte d'Adhémar, the French Ambassador, had paid Lord Stanhope, captivated by the plumed hats of the well-fed lackeys, flattered by the courteous manners and sweeping bows of the Count, had decided to go to France, to see what was happening there.

She had been overtaken far from the land, How well Hester recognised that little adventurous girl ! . . .

But the first stars were shining in the clear sky, and this tall woman in mourning, who had remained motionless for hours, watching without seeing them the varying sports of the grey waves, rose at last and left the bridge while the *Jason* bore her to the conquest of the Orient.

CHAPTER II

MEDITERRANEAN YACHTING

ON a beautiful spring morning a frigate cast anchor in the Bay of Gibraltar. Lady Hester disembarked with a young lady companion, Miss Williams, who had been a long time in the service of the family, an English lady's-maid, Anne Fry, a German cook and innumerable trunks. Everyone was lodged, including the brother, at the Convent, the residence of the Governor, Lieutenant-General Campbell. Mr. Sutton and the doctor were obliged to find lodgings elsewhere.

Spain was then almost entirely in the hands of the French, and it was by no means prudent to go far from the fort. Rides on horseback could not be indulged in except on the narrow isthmus which connected the fort with the shore, sandy ground, which was, besides, excellent for a gallop. The travellers also visited the fortifications. The most content in the matter was Dr. Meryon. Consider, then, the weather was fine, the weather was warm, the trees were green and the flowers in bud, and one was able to bathe every day in the tepid sea, which, for

an Englishman, is important. And it was only by the merest chance that he had not remained in England ! In truth—if the weather had not been icy-cold ; if he had not missed the coach ; if he had not run along the Oxford road to overtake it ; if he had not mounted the coach heated from his exertions ; if he had not caught cold ; if he had not returned to London ; if Cline, the surgeon's son, had not come to see him ; if he had not spoken to him of the proposal of Lady Hester Stanhope, who was in search of a doctor, he would be at that moment in the damp meadows of Oxford, coughing and growing musty ! You see how destiny is sometimes affected by a few glasses of ale ! And the doctor, who was a philosopher, took bathe upon bathe with delight. There were some slight inconveniences in living on this isolated rock : the meat was tough and bony, and vegetables were lacking. On the other hand, there was plenty of wine, but it was bad, which did not prevent the servants from being always drunk.

Lady Hester did she regard this halt as a pilgrimage ? In Spanish soil slept her brother, Major Charles Stanhope, and her friend, General Sir John Moore, killed scarcely a year earlier, in that terrible battle of Coruña. General Moore was one of those fine types of officer which fascinate energetic and enterprising women, combining in some fashion their dream of heroism

and virility. Very handsome in his person, tall and admirably made, the features of the face attaining a perfection which had nothing of insipidity about them, he had fulfilled the promises which he gave at the age of thirteen, when his father wrote :

“He is truly a handsome boy ; he dances, rides on horseback, fences with extraordinary skill. He draws capably, speaks and writes French very well and has serious notions of geography, arithmetic and geometry. . . . He is continually showing me how Geneva can be taken.”

The Moores were then at Geneva, which the young man was soon to leave to travel in France, Germany and Italy. He continued to perfect his education ; the first part permitted him to render himself agreeable to women, the second aided him in his career as an officer, at any rate it is to be hoped that it did. The knowledge of French was useful to both. The profession of arms was at that time a very attractive one, for England was in the midst of the American War, while the more serious wars of the Revolution and Empire were to follow. There was promotion to be won and no time to stagnate in garrison towns. Young Ensign Moore took part in all the fêtes and journeyed across the world. For an intelligent lad to see the country is never a disagreeable thing. We find him at Minorca in

1776, then in America in 1779. He takes part in the famous Corsican expedition by the side of Paoli. He is sent to San Lucia, commands a brigade at the Helder under the orders of Abercromby, returns to Minorca, goes to Malta, takes part in the Egyptian campaign, is very nearly going to the Indies and in 1808 is finally appointed commander-in-chief of the troops in Spain. Accidents by the way were not lacking. He was wounded so often that his friends surnamed him the "unlucky one."

In his last campaign it seems that ill-luck, indeed, pursued him. Moore relied confidently on the resistance of the Spaniards in Madrid and was in entire ignorance of the negotiations of Prince Castelfranco and Don Thomas Morla to surrender the town. The admirable English army, 29,000 strong, was concentrated at Toro and the infantry was within two hours' march of the French, when a letter, intercepted by chance, suddenly informed him that Napoleon had made his entry into Madrid no less than three weeks earlier. Then began that magnificent retreat, in the depth of winter, over 250 miles of difficult and hilly country. Hard pressed by the enemy, the exhausted English army reached Coruña on January 16. The embarkation was hurried on, but the enemy was already descending from the heights in serried columns. Lord Bentinck's brigade sustained the shock. Moore

was justly applauding an heroic charge of the 50th, under the orders of Majors Napier and Stanhope, when a bullet struck him and shattered his shoulder. He lived until the evening. His soldiers buried him as dawn was breaking, on a gloomy January day, and while they were digging the grave with their bayonets the enemy's cannon began to growl again, as if to render funeral honours to the dead.

Moore was certainly not an ordinary officer. "His abilities and his coolness," said Napoleon of him, "alone saved the English army of Spain from destruction. He was a brave soldier, an excellent officer and a man of valour. He committed some faults which were no doubt inseparable from the difficulties in the midst of which he was struggling and occasioned perhaps by the mistakes of his intelligence service." In the mouth of Napoleon, rather sparing of praise, is not this the finest military eulogium ?

What Lady Hester did not perhaps know is that her hero, during a mission in Sicily, had nearly married Miss Caroline Fox, the daughter of General Henry Edward Fox. He had been prevented by a chivalrous sentiment in thinking of the difference of age which existed between the young girl and himself. And also, to be candid, by the fear of being indebted to his high position for a heart which he aspired to owe only

to himself. Singular scruple when we reflect that the general was then forty-five years old !

Would Lady Hester have continued to wear the miniature of the brilliant officer and to drag it with her in her peregrinations across the Orient, if she had been acquainted with this trifling detail ? It is probable that she did not lack kind lady friends too happy to furnish her with abundant information on this subject. But General Moore was dead, and survivors have a tendency to idealise those who are no longer there to contradict them. . . .

Soon Captain Stanhope received orders to rejoin his regiment. Mr. Sutton left for Minorca, whither his affairs called him. Lady Hester, tired of garrison life, took advantage of the offer which was made her by Captain Whitby, commander of the *Cerberus*, to convey her to Malta. Her departure took place on April 7.

A fortnight later Lady Hester disembarked at Valetta. She was expected at Malta, and several notabilities solicited the honour of entertaining her. She chose the house of Mr. Fernandez, the commissary-general. The town presented an agreeable prospect with its wide streets intersecting one another at right angles and the low houses with their flat roofs.

The doctor found life good ; well lodged, well fed, he appreciated the daily fare. Meals allowed three complete services and five to ten

different wines, and were followed by coffee and liqueurs, as in France.

He wandered, amused, across Valetta, followed by a troupe of naked and dusty children, jostled by the Maltese, whose woolly hair, olive skin and flat noses caused him to dream already of barbarian countries, passing the women with their shawls of black silk placed on the head, descending in graceful folds, which enveloped the body and half-veiled the face. Little, at least they appeared so to him, for daily life with Lady Hester was obliged to distort a little the accurate computation of figures, their feet and hands admirable, he compared them *in petto*, in taking away their necklaces, bracelets and chains with which they were overloaded, to little English serving-maids, without any offensive intention on his part, but because he could not find, in his national pride, a better comparison to express the admiration with which their plump arms and their full figures inspired him.

He walked also in the magnificent Cathedral of San Giovanni, whose pavement in mosaics of glistening colours gave him the illusion of walking on the pictures from the gallery of the Louvre taken from their frames and sewn together. And then what fêtes ! So long as Lord Bute was Governor of the island the doctor had to stand aside. Constantly Lady Hester said to him : “ Doctor, I am dining this evening with

Lord Bute ; you are not invited, but do not regret that, for he is a haughty man who does not like doctors and tutors to open their mouths before he addresses them. Also take advantage of my absence to invite whomever you like to dine with you ; I have given orders to Franz (the German cook).”

At the end of May, this Governor who had such bad taste was recalled, and General Oakes, who succeeded him, was a very worthy gentleman. Never will the doctor see again such brilliant receptions. . . . Malta was then the fashion ; the Neapolitan nobility, which had refused to recognise the usurper Murat, had flowed back there *en masse*, and the English, always travelling, and to whom the Continental blockade, in closing Europe to them, had given a revival of restlessness, had no choice and preferred still the mild climate of Valetta to the London fog so much vaunted.

There were every day dinners of sixty covers at the Governor's palace. The thousands of candles which the silver cressets and the chased candelabra supported did not succeed in lighting the monumental staircase ; they illuminated the line of salons, plunged into the depths of the hall, lingered over the faded brocades and the old tapestries, glided over the waves of the mural frescoes representing a naval combat between the Christian Knights and the Moors,

caressed the dark tresses of the beautiful Neapolitan ladies, flashed on the laced uniforms of the English officers of the garrison, played on the gala costumes, magnificent and strange, of the Greek and Levantine Navy, to glitter finally on the blonde hair of Lady Hester Stanhope, whose haughty head dominated this picturesque medley of races. At the supper which followed the ball, a table was arranged on a daïs, which reminded the doctor of Oxford University. . . . But what a difference! One evening did he not accompany a lady of high and authentic rank, and, sitting by her, did he not find himself separated from the Governor, who was flanked on the right by the Duchesse of Pienna and on the left by Lady Hester, by the width of the table, not by the length—the width you must clearly understand? And with a score of lords, dukes, marquises and counts all around!

The summer came. Lady Hester accepted the kind offer of General Oakes, who placed at her disposal the Palazzo San Antonio, a few miles from Valetta. The palace was a large building, flanked by a tower simulating a belfry. The interior was spacious and well ventilated, but the total absence of rugs and carpets, in order to keep it cool, gave the doctor the impression of being always on the floor of the kitchen.

What was wonderful there were the gardens. The place recalled that of the Orangery at Ver-

sailles, but never will the most assiduous care be able, in the French climate, to obtain orange-trees, lemon-trees and pomegranate-trees so vigorous and so beautiful. What magnificent shooting of the sap towards the sun, expanding in domes of glistening leaves, in flowers of purple, in fruits of gold ! Double oleanders, of the shape of hazel-trees, diffused their bitter and sharp odour. Hedges of myrtle ten feet high separated thickets of giant roses and bound a terrace, forming a colonnade where the vine suspended itself in arches and mingled its ripe grapes with the green branches.

Many foreigners and English people touched at Malta ; amongst them Mr. Michael Bruce, the bold Colonel Bruce who, with the assistance of Sir Robert Wilson and Mr. Hutchinson, had succeeded in contriving the escape of Lavalette, on the eve of his execution, and in enabling him to cross the frontier. Learning that Lady Stanhope's brother had been recalled by his military duties, he resolved to take his place near her and to accompany her throughout the perilous journey which she had resolved to undertake across European and Asiatic Turkey. Sweet solicitude !

Soon the heat became infernal. They were in the month of August, and the thermometer registered 85 degrees Fahrenheit at midday. Lady Hester, who had lost appetite and suffered

from acute indigestion, decided to go to Constantinople, the only corner of Europe accessible to the English. Sicily, which had for a moment attracted her, was threatened by an invasion of Murat.

Not being able to obtain a King's ship, an American brig, the *Belle-Poule*, was hired to cross the Ionian Sea. Miss Williams remained at Malta with her sister, who was married to a commissariat officer.

The travellers touched at the Isle of Zante, the flower of the Levant, the golden isle, which the English had conquered the previous year at the same time as Ithaca, Cerigo and Cephalonia. What an enchanting vision greeted them on entering the harbour ! On the right, at the foot of a wooded mountain, lay the white houses of a delicious little town hidden in the olive woods of a light and vaporish grey ; and tall and sombre cypress-trees climbed across the fields of wild vine to the assault of the citadel which dominated and completed this dream landscape. It was the time of the raisin harvest, and women with faces much painted, a layer of white about their lips, were drying the grapes in the warm sun of the Orient which blackens the skins, swollen with juice, in a few days.

One ought not to remain too long in too beautiful countries. Their complete perfection produces insensibly an ennui which paralyses and

a depression of the mind which leads too quickly to yawning admiration, then to torpor. It is perhaps for that reason that the great artists, the great workers, those who produce and struggle, avoid the enchanted lands of the South, where beauty is an easy conquest within the reach of all. Lady Hester, who cared only for action, stayed a fortnight at Zante ; and on August 23 a felucca brought her to Patras. There she was rejoined by the Marquis of Sligo, whose yacht was wandering across the Mediterranean. The marquis joined himself as well to the expedition. Yet a new bodyguard !

At Corinth, Lady Stanhope received a visit from the Bey's harem. The interpreter begged the men to retire, but Lord Sligo, Bruce and the doctor thought that now or never was their opportunity to admire the Turkish beauties to the life. A bey, whose will was law throughout the province, ought not to choose ugly women to beguile his hours of leisure. They concealed themselves, therefore, behind a wainscot whose kind crevices permitted them to see without being seen.

The women, placed at their ease by Lady Hester's kind reception, began soon to unveil and to throw off their ferigees. Some were pretty and stretched themselves on the sofa in studied attitudes. They communicated with Lady Hester by signs and gestures. Intrigued by her strange

garments, they began to discuss in detail the different parts of her costume and to compare them with their own, curious to understand European lingerie. Unaware that they were spied upon by the men's eyes, they uncovered their feet bare to the heel, reddened by henna, and their white bosoms which the Turkish robes, loose at the neck and shoulder, allowed one to see. They quickly became familiar, their gestures, in default of words, were more expressive. Lady Stanhope was very embarrassed at the disagreeable situation in which the curiosity of her friends had placed her. To extricate her in time from this difficulty and judging that they had seen enough, they gave vent to stifled laughter. Instantly, as though struck by an electric shock, the young women resumed their veils over their ferigees, their gaiety fled away and they imperiously demanded, by signs, the explanation of these mysterious sounds. This time it was the position of Sligo, Bruce and Meryon which was critical; if the bey came to learn of the adventure, his vengeance would not tarry. Lady Hester, with great sang-froid, reassured the women and succeeded in pacifying them; but, soon afterwards, they rose to depart, thinking, without any doubt, that it was better to be silent and not to draw upon themselves the suspicion of their lord and master, jealous like every self-respecting Turk.

Having passed the Isthmus of Corinth on horseback, Lady Hester and her suite, which amounted to twenty-five persons—Lord Sligo having for his share : a Tartar, two Albanians, with their yataghans by their sides, a dragoman, a Turkish cook, an artist to sketch picturesque scenery and costumes (the photographer of the time), and three English servants in livery and one without livery!—embarked at Kenkri for Athens.

The French consul at Janina, François Pouqueville, was looking forward to Lady Hester's visit.

"Greece is therefore now the country whither the English flock to cure the spleen," he writes on October 8, 1810. "One sees only mylords, princes, but what one would never have expected there is the '*mi-carême*,' yes, the '*mi-carême*.' She is a great lady of forty years and more, relative or aunt of Mr. Pitt, attacked by the twofold malady of antiquity and celebrity, who has appeared on the horizon. The said lady, guarded by a doctor and two lackeys, has debouched in the Morea. We are assured that she intends to make the pilgrimage to Thyrinth, where was that fountain into which Juno, the '*mi-carême*' of Olympus, used to descend every year to bathe and from which she used to emerge a maiden. From the lustral waters, our traveller will visit Thermopylæ, will make a survey of Pharsalia, where her great-grandfather beat Pompey, and

will come like 'my aunt Aurore' to sentimentalise under the arbours of Tempea. I await her on the shores of Acherusia.¹ We shall see this Fate."

The gallant consul lost his time and money the "*mi-carême*" did not come to Janina.

On their arrival at the Piræus, the travellers saw a man who was flinging himself from the great mole into the sea. The exploits of Byron repeating Leander's achievement and crossing the Hellespont by swimming, had already come to their ears. Lord Sligo felt sure that he recognised him in this bold diver and hailed him. Byron, for it was indeed he, dressed in haste and soon came to join them. He even lent his horses to go to Athens to find means of transport in order to fetch Lady Hester and his numerous trunks.

Having nothing to do, Bruce and the doctor tried to enter into relations with a band of young veiled Turkish girls seated on the beach. The latter, scared, took to flight, and Bruce, who had not learned enough from his recent experience, made many signs to them to induce them to remain. Some Turks who were lounging about the jetty muttered threats against this enterprising Frank. He narrowly escaped getting into mischief.

At Athens, Lady Hester, who was an excellent

¹ Ancient name of the Lake of Janina.

organiser of comfort, transformed in a few hours her temporary house into a pleasant home, where every evening an agreeable little company assembled.

Byron, who had been at college with Sligo and Bruce, was amongst the number; but finding the manners of the hostess too despotic, he soon grew tired. He pleaded urgent business in the Morea and did not reappear until a few days before his departure. It is always disagreeable for those who have fled from their country to meet their compatriots again. It diminishes the consideration of the inhabitants, above all when these new-comers possess illustrious rank, originality and eccentricity. Lady Hester and Byron could compete on these three points, and this accidental occurrence of what an Englishman hates the most in the world, to be acquainted with another travelling Englishman, was not calculated to establish a sympathetic intercourse.

On Byron's side, the affair was complicated by wounded masculine vanity. Anxious to excess concerning its beauty and its harmony, he suffered enormously from his constant lameness. And now chance was giving him as a rival a woman redoubtable, astonishingly attractive, notwithstanding that she had a figure like a grenadier, and possessing two feet superbly arched and of equal size, which did not allow

themselves to be easily forgotten ! Men have never cared to meet superior women, even in the size of their shoes.

Lady Hester, who prided herself upon being a physiognomist, considered his eyes defective ; the only thing that pleased her was the ringlet on his forehead. For Byron, accustomed to other conquests, this was indeed little. As for the poet, "it is easy enough to write verses," confided he to the doctor, "and as to the matter of ideas, God knows where you find them ! You pick up some old books which no one knows and borrow what is inside." The man of the world and the man of letters having been united in a general reprobation, Byron made the best of the situation : that is to say, by separating without delay from this Britannic Juno.

The doctor less stern, saw Byron more often. He remarked his singular manner of entering a drawing-room, making skilful détours from chair to chair, so far as that which he had chosen, anxious to conceal his lameness, which this manœuvre, after all, made the more apparent. Byron exploited this admiration in persuading the doctor to attend a young Greek girl in whom he was greatly interested.

CHAPTER III

ORIENTAL INITIATION

ON October 16, 1810, Lady Hester Stanhope and her companions left Athens on board of a Greek polacca. But, having been enlightened in regard to the skill of the mariners who, in time of storm, fold their arms, invoking St. George and leaving Heaven to take charge of the working of the ship, they disembarked in all haste at Erakli—the ancient Heraclea—and Lord Sligo and Bruce proceeded to Constantinople to seek aid. They returned with a Turkish officer provided with a firman. Barques awaited, of that type in which the prow is shallow and the poop pointed, with those fine bronze-chested sailors, with flowing breeches and scarlet tarboosh, whose deep voices add to the melancholy of the passage the charm of unknown tongues.

On one of those November evenings which tinge the sky with delicate and glowing roses, just when the countless minarets of the mosques of Constantinople were fading into the night come unexpectedly, the barques stopped at Topkhana. A sedan-chair for Lady Hester, and

for the others the walk through the steep and mountainous streets. The lugubrious barking of the famished dogs wandering, in bands, in the deserted quarters, the capricious flame of the lantern which precedes the caravan, sometimes lighting up old leprous houses, at others throwing into the shadow gardens of which hardly a glimpse could be had—it was Pera.

What long strolls in the narrow streets in which the absence of carriages made the voices sound strangely! Passing between the double hedge of merchants who seemed to watch purchasers from the depths of their shops like spiders crouching in their webs, Lady Hester and her friends had the impression of moving about under the jeering eyes of a row of servants.

One Friday, an Amazon calmly traversed the streets of Constantinople. She was Lady Hester, who was on her way to attend the procession of the Sultan Mahmoud so far as the mosque, and had found this convenient means to avoid being annoyed by the populace, dirty and dusty, as could possibly be desired. It was the first time that a woman, a European, with face uncovered, promenaded thus equipped. It was necessary to be of the stamp of Lady Hester, to have her contempt of opinion, her disdain of social conventions, her insensate desire to get herself talked about, her love of sensation, to attempt so bold an enterprise. It was necessary to possess

her tall figure, her impressive countenance, her manly appearance, to succeed and pass without insults. The spectacle, besides, was worth this risk.

Janissaries, in brand-new uniforms, keep in check the crowd while the police distribute the blows of "Korbach." First came some dozens of water-carriers, spilling in the dust the sacred liquid, without any stint. Then a confused and important mass of servants, equerries, executioners. Then, surrounded by footmen, mounted on a horse magnificently caparisoned, a man with a proud and distant air, wearing a dark beard. "Here is the Sultan!" exclaimed the doctor and his friends. But it was only the officer who bore the Sultan's footstool. . . . The mistakes are repeated for the sword-bearer and the pipe-bearer. "This time, it is he!" Not yet. And the Captain Pacha, the Reis Effendi, the Kakliya Bey, the Grand Vizier, enveloped in their priceless pelisses, the hilts of their khandjars blazing with diamonds and throwing sparks, pass nonchalantly on their chargers, which are half-crushed beneath the weight of the harness, casting on the people bored glances.

On a sudden, there came the most profound silence, a silence mournful, heavy, uneasy, and a singular murmur, monotonous and plaintive, like the voice of the swell beating against the

cliffs, rose from the prostrate crowd—all these men, bringing the folds of their robes over their chests with a concerted gesture, called down the blessings of Mahomet on the Commander of the Faithful. And Mahmoud passed. . . . His escort, dressed in garments of brocade plaited with golden and silver threads and wearing plumed helmets, surrounded him with a rampart of fluttering and nodding plumes and hid his person from the generality of mortals. His stallion, of a snowy whiteness, disappeared beneath the saddle-cloths and gala trappings which were studded with mother-of-pearl and pearls and multi-coloured gems. The crowd rose again; Kislár Aga, the Minister of Pleasures—happy Minister!—a hideous negro with a bestial countenance, followed, surrounded by a hundred eunuchs, both black and white. A bunch of eunuchs! Finally, a dwarf preceded three hundred pages of haughty bearing, clad in white satin.

After spending a few days at Constantinople, Lady Stanhope abandoned her house at Pera, which was too small, for a villa at Therapia. The waves of the Bosphorus came to beat against the walls, and afar off the transparent wintry light bathed the Asiatic coast and the shores of the Black Sea. The visitors were numerous: Stratford Canning, English Ambassador at the Sublime Porte; Mr. Henry Pearce, a friend of

Bruce ; Mr. Taylor, who arrived from Egypt and Syria ; Lord Plymouth and many others. Constantinople was very gay ; receptions and balls followed one another, and only the dragoons, in their parti-coloured costumes, gave to them an Oriental tinge. For the Turks rarely mix with Europeans, fearing the length of their meals and the use of wine.

The doctor, upon whom his profession conferred special privileges, received invitations from the Captain Pacha's medical attendant. Meals which might nourish the vanity, if not the stomach. The fare was not bad, but scarcely was a dish placed upon the table than diligent servants pounced upon it and carried it away. And then the clear water, however pure and fresh it might be, was not a beverage which was long endurable.

Lady Hester was soon on a footing of intimacy with several distinguished Turks. "One ought to see them," she wrote, "seated under the trees of a public promenade, not distinguishing the Greek, Armenian or European women, but looking at them *en bloc* like sheep in a meadow." She invited the Captain Pacha's brother to dinner, and, very quickly familiarised with the use of knives, forks and chairs, he spent more than half an hour at table—which is a great concession for a Turk—ate of everything, including the good substantial English roast joints

and the heavy greasy puddings, enjoyed three or four glasses of wine and appeared enchanted with all that his hostess offered him. It was true that the hostess was not an ordinary one.

To charm her hours of leisure which all these occupations did not contrive to fill, she went to visit the ships of the Turkish fleet, in the dress of an officer. She wanted to see everything, examined everything in detail, ferreted everywhere and returned delighted with her expedition. To one of her friends, who, shocked at her masculine garments, took the liberty of reproaching her on the subject, she retorted with her customary impetuosity : " Breeches, a military cloak and a hat with a plume are no doubt a more indecent costume than that of your fine madams half-naked in their ball dresses."

From February the weather abruptly changed. Never was English spring more severe. There was a foot of snow, and Lady Hester suffered cruelly from the cold, for the brasiers which they carried about from one room to another did not give even the illusion of warmth. She had a wild desire to leave for Italy or for France, desire so much the more ardent that the English were forbidden to enter these countries. She left no stone unturned to approach M. de Latour-Maubourg, the French Ambassador at Constantinople. It was a difficult task, for relations between French and English were so strained

that it was forbidden, even to private individuals of the two nations, to have any intercourse with each other. Lady Hester was like one of those thoroughbreds of which William Pitt spoke. You are able to guide them with a hair and their pace is regular and easy, but if you thwart them, they rear and become furious. The obstacles excited instead of stopping her. She swore that she would see M. de Latour-Maubourg, and she kept her word. She took long walks through the Turkish country and rambled in the inextricable alleys of Pera to throw off the scent of the spies whom Canning, become suspicious, had launched in pursuit of her, poor devils who had never been accustomed to such rough work. One day, when she was going to join the French Ambassador on the shores of the Bosphorus, she was followed. . . . On the morrow, Canning asked her :

“Lady Hester, where did you spend the day yesterday ? ”

She took the offensive :

“Has not your spy informed you ? ”

Canning began to laugh and lectured her :

“If you continue, I shall be obliged to write to England.”

But Lady Hester did not allow herself to be intimidated easily.

“Ah well,” replied she, “I shall also write a letter in my style : ‘Dear Sir,—Your young and

excellent Minister, in order to prove his worth, has begun his diplomatic career by causing ladies to be followed to their rendezvous, and so forth.'”

During this time, Latour-Maubourg was working actively to obtain the authorisation desired and sent letter upon letter to Paris. Meanwhile, Lady Hester, Bruce and the doctor set out for the sulphur baths of Broussa; Broussa the green, Broussa the divine, with its white houses lost in the forests of pointed minarets, of tall cypress-trees and broad plane-trees; Broussa which sleeps at the foot of Olympus in an ocean of orchards eternally in flower and in fruit, to the thirst-quenching sounds of the countless cascades descending from the mountains.

Some months later, they returned to Constantinople, or rather to Bebec, the lease of the villa at Therapia having expired. All the wealthy Turks had their summer residences on the shores of the Bosphorus, and hours passed, carelessly and quickly, in watching row past the richly decorated barges, with their flashing draperies, which conveyed from door to door the beautiful visitors. But to obtain provisions was a difficult matter; the doctor suffered from the heat and regretted the good dinners in the English fashion. Here there was nothing but mutton, nothing but mutton, and if it had only been eatable! There was certainly some fish to be had which could be fried, but the fishermen were so powerful! . . .

Lady Hester not caring to spend another winter at Constantinople and not receiving any reply from France, decided to sail for Egypt. The climate attracted her, and perhaps also the recollection of Moore, which urged her to go towards the places through which he had passed. Then began for the doctor a punishment of another kind. He had certainly succeeded as a doctor at Constantinople. A marvellous cure, vanity quite apart, performed on the Danish Minister, had made him the fashion. One morning he had awakened to find himself famous. The Captain Pacha made him attend his wife, who, after all, died. He had illustrious patients, even the Princess Morousi, wife of the former Hospodar of Wallachia ! He became the habitué of the harems and began, as so many others had, to taste the charm of the women of the Orient. He admired everything in them ; their skin fragrant and soft, their long hair to which the henna imparted reddish reflections, their slight (?) embonpoint which rendered their contours softer and accentuated the languidness of their movements. He began a crusade against the use of European corsets, since his deities did not wear them. And arrived at the highest point of poetic enthusiasm, he cried :

“ The ottoman is their throne and the flower which bends its head their model ! ”

Decidedly, he was in the mood to lose the

notion of the straight line ! And now all of a sudden, because this tall woman, who assuredly had not soft movements, had decided upon it, he was obliged to depart !

His beautiful patients brought him on his departure their fees concealed in the embroideries which their white hands had themselves executed. And if, in the course of his voyage, the doctor chanted the praises of the Turks, nay, even of the Armenians, and was very cold in referring to the Greeks, do not seek for political reasons. It is quite simply that the first were much more generous !

Lord Sligo, the best-hearted of men, the warmest of friends, had returned to Malta in the course of the winter. But Lady Hester found another escort in the person of Mr. Pearce, who solicited the honour of joining the expedition.

On October 23, 1811, accompanied by seven Greek servants, amongst whom was a young man, Giorgio Dallegio, of dark complexion, active, alert, speaking three or four languages, and who was not slow in attracting Lady Hester's attention, the travellers embarked for Alexandria, on board of a Greek vessel, with a Greek crew, alas ! But they had no choice. Contrary winds retained them near Rhodes until November 23. Four days later, a nice little storm of the first class came on. As though this was not enough work, they sprung a leak,

and at night the master began to shout : “ All hands to the pumps.” All hands to the pumps is very quickly said, but Levantine vessels rarely possess pumps, and when they have them they are worthless, which, by chance, was the case now. Bruce, Pearce, the doctor and the seven servants set to work and emptied in regular order the buckets into the sea. Lady Hester, to whom a little air of danger was attractive, encouraged them by voice and gesture and distributed wine, which was of more value. Day broke ; the sea was of a leaden hue, the sky of a dirty grey. The Greeks threw themselves into the bottom of the boat, calling upon all the saints of Christianity : “ *Panagia mou ! Panagia mou !* ” but taking good care not to put into action the useful proverb : “ Aid thyself, Heaven will aid thee ! ” The south-western point of Rhodes appeared ; the vessel no longer answered to her helm ; through the rent which had grown wider the water was entering with a sinister gurgle, weighing down the ship which, like a great gull wounded unto death, was leaning in an alarming manner and was lying on its side. The masts cracked. Then the master—who was no use except to shout—roared in a voice of thunder :

“ Launch the cutter.”

Rush of twenty-five persons. The doctor had still the presence of mind to run and fetch his fees hidden in the cabin. The wind tossed the

little vessel about like the parings of an onion ; waves covered her incessantly, and the doctor found that there were a great many “ tubs ” for one man.

The last hope of the shipwrecked was a rock half a mile away. By dint of efforts and of savage struggles for life, they reached the reef. It was not, however, the refuge they had longed for. The seas swept the greater part of it ; a narrow excavation was the only sheltered spot. Lady Hester and her maid established themselves there as their right. Night came. No water, except the waterspouts which the sky cast down without counting, no provisions ! At midnight, the wind having fallen a little, the master suggested that he should go with the crew to fetch help from Rhodes, adding that, if everyone wanted to come, he would answer for nothing. Willingly or unwillingly, Lady Hester and her friends allowed them to go, making them promise to light a fire so soon as they reached the land. In what bitter reflections did the unfortunates indulge as they shivered there in the darkness, rinsed by the waves, lashed by the rain, buffeted by the wind, stupefied by the moaning voices of the raging sea ! The doctor, as he tightened his belt by a hole, did not rail against those brutes of Greeks. At last a flame perforated the night. Then nothing more. A timid sun succeeded in piercing the curtains of clouds, then

declined towards the horizon. It was thirty hours since the shipwrecked had eaten anything. The doctor was sure that these brutes had abandoned them without remorse. Suddenly, the piercing sight of Lady Hester descried a black speck which finally became a boat. The calumniated crew, with the exception of the master, who had preferred to direct the rescue from a distance, was returning, bringing bread, cheese and water. But the sailors had consoled themselves abundantly on land with arrack; they were drunk, and their insolence increased every minute. All the alcohol which they had consumed rendered them indifferent to the squalls of wind and rain which had begun again. Deaf to the entreaties of the passengers, they decided to embark forthwith.

Lady Hester and her friends preferred to run the risk of sudden death rather than perish slowly of inanition on that forlorn rock. They landed safe and sound, to the general astonishment, and took refuge in a neighbouring hamlet, miserable and leprous. Filthy houses! The English would not have been willing to use them as pigsties. The rain penetrated them, and the bed of manure spread on the ground exhaled a nauseating odour. And an increasing invasion of shaggy rats and of voracious fleas!

The doctor set out for Rhodes in all haste in order to bring back money and provisions.

The bey received him very badly, though it is true that the doctor cut a very sorry figure in his garments of a rescued traveller. Meantime, Lady Hester, who had endeavoured to leave the hovel in which she was stranded, had fallen ill on the way. She had nothing by way of luggage except General Moore's miniature, a snuff-box given her by Lord Sligo, and two pelisses. Precious souvenirs, no doubt, but of no utility. The consul, who was an old man of seventy-five, was unable to do anything for them, and the bey pretended to be so poor that, after having granted them thirty pounds, he begged them not to trouble him further. Thirty pounds! It was little for eleven persons naked and famished.

The loss the most irreparable was that of the medicine chest. Finally, however, everything was arranged. Lady Hester, whose adventurous character accommodated itself to the unexpected, praised the Turks warmly: "I do not know how it is done, but I am always at ease with them and I obtain all that I ask for. As for the Greeks, it is quite different; they are cheats, cheats. . . ." The doctor had made a good recruit.

Lady Hester, who resigned herself to the misadventures of the others as readily as she did to her own, wrote, in speaking of Bruce, Pearce and Meryon, to one of her friends: "They are

quite well ; they have saved nothing from the wreck ; but do not imagine that we are melancholy, at any rate, for we have all danced, myself included, the Pyrrhic dance with the peasants of the villages which were on our way ! ” What an exceptional character ! A woman who has lost all her trunks and who dances the Pyrrhic dance !

The doctor, who had been despatched on a confidential mission to Smyrna, to bring back money, without which one can do nothing in the Orient, and clothes, without which one can go nowhere, returned with boxes and coffers.

Lady Hester, Bruce and Pearce threw themselves upon him like children and arrayed themselves as fancy dictated. They donned magnificent and strange costumes, which seemed to form part of a vast Turkish emporium. The doctor completed his accoutrement by thrusting a yataghan through his girdle.

Lady Hester, finding herself very much at her ease with her Turkish robe, her turban and her burnous, decreed that she should travel thus henceforth. And the wearing of this masculine costume was to remove many difficulties in permitting her to move everywhere with her face uncovered. From his stay in Rhodes the doctor preserved two principal recollections : first, that the English raise the cost of living wherever they go ; next, that the women of the island weave

very durable silk shirts, which can be worn for three years without tearing them.

Captain Henry Hope, commanding the frigate *Salsette*, in the harbour of Smyrna, having learned of Lady Hester's shipwreck, came to fetch her to convey her to Egypt. At the beginning of February, 1812, the *Salsette* entered the port of Alexandria. Colonel Misset, the English Resident, was full of kindness and attentions; he laughed till the tears came into his eyes at the singular costumes of the travellers and gave them advice as to their behaviour. Lady Hester took a violent dislike to the town. "The place is hideous," said she twenty-four hours after her arrival; "and if all Egypt resembles it, I feel that I shall not stay there long."

The French occupation was remembered by everyone, but the Christians of Alexandria had peculiar taste and coldly confessed their preference for Turkish rule. What a difference between the justice meted out by the French and that by the Turks! With the *cadi*, when a man was accused of murder, the case was not protracted. He was confronted with the witnesses, and then and there he was either released, or imprisoned, or bastinadoed or executed. If he were thrown into prison, the amount of compensation was immediately fixed, at five, ten, one hundred piastres, according to the importance of the

victim and the means of the assassin. The latter circumvented influential friends ; it was necessary for the friends to be influential.

“Come,” said they, “a thousand piastres, between us, if you say a word for him.”

They made discreet inquiries of the Governor’s mistress for the time being, whom a diamond ring persuaded to intercede for the unfortunate man. Entreated on the right, supplicated on the left, solicited at the baths, tormented in his harem, harpooned by some, harassed by others, the Governor ended by demanding mercy, remitted the fine and released the prisoner. At any rate, they knew what to expect ; it was clear, plain, precise, if not just. While with the French—Oh ! There now ! A poor little crime of no importance at all dragged on for months, for years. . . . And how could you expect that a lawsuit would not be perpetuated when there were so many notaries, so many attorneys, so many advocates, clerks, registrars and scribes interested in prolonging.

Lady Hester proceeded to Rosetta—town with this charming name, guarded by its ramparts of red bricks and its groves of palm-trees, from where she intended to ascend the course of the Nile so far as Cairo. She hired two boats, and the wonderful voyage began. Wide, powerful, calm, impressive and deep, it was truly the king of rivers, the river which gives life, the river

which saves. . . . Flotillas of earthen jars tied together by branches followed the current of the stream. *Kanjes* bearing beehives, piled up in the form of pyramids, descended slowly. They were the bees which had flown to meet the spring, and which, having left two months earlier for the plains of Upper Egypt, where the sainfoin and the clover were already ripening, were now returning with their golden booty towards the Delta. The travellers met innumerable barges with curved prows and rafts laden with big restless oxen. At the villages they revictualled in flour, eggs and poultry. They took their meals on board and the days slipped by like hours. Sometimes the banks were high and the water very low, and curious persons landed to get a view of the land. They returned very quickly towards the boat, disappointed by the sadness and the monotony of the immense plains with their trifling undulations, rebuffed by the hostile reception of the hamlets: mass of mud, huts of loam, labyrinth of alleys where the foot slips in dried camel-dung, headlong flight of the women who hide themselves, squalling of children at the maternal heels, grumbling of fellahs suspecting the tax-gatherers, baying of dogs, putrid odour which rises from beings and things which decomposition lies in wait for.

The Arabs say that if Mahomet had tasted the water of the Nile, he would have wished to remain

in this world to drink it. But the doctor preserved his preference for the growths of France, nay, even for the resinous wines of Chio.

At Boulak the voyage stopped. The harbour was swarming with those tiny donkey-drivers who make such incredible charges. Shaking their saddles with the tall pummels decorated with tassels, mirrors and pendants, waving their glass trinkets, decked out, ornamented, like shrines, their mischievous eyes watching the customer, making ready to rush so soon as they catch sight of a Turkish soldier, whose stern countenance implies an empty purse (an astute trick of their masters!), they hailed in our travellers a fine windfall.

Scarcely was Lady Hester installed with Bruce in a house at Cairo than she prepared for her visit to the pacha. She adopted for this solemn occasion a Berber costume, of which the wild magnificence suited her proud and independent demeanour. Trousers of dazzling silk laminated with gold, heavy robe of purplish velvet ornamented with rude and sumptuous embroidery, shawl of cashmere forming turban and girdle, sabre with hilt encrusted with precious stones. It had cost her more than £300. Bruce treated himself to a sword worth 1000 piastres. As for the doctor, he was satisfied with the modest apparel of an Effendi.

The Pacha sent five horses richly caparisoned

in the Mameluke fashion, on which Lady Hester and her suite mounted to go to the palace. They alighted only in the second court.

Mehemet Ali, who had never seen Englishwomen, was greatly delighted at this interview, and awaited his fair visitor in a pavilion in the midst of the gardens of the harem. He rose to go to meet her and made her sit on divans of scarlet satin which were covered with precious filigree-work. Mosaics rambled over the open walls, singing all the gamut of blues: warm blues, blues deep and velvety, mauve blues, blues with reflections of silver. Stained-glass windows muffled the light received by the transparent enamels and arabesques of gold where slept dead turquoises, monstrous rubies and emeralds. A jet of water fell back weeping into a shining basin.

Black slave girls handed crystal cups in which slowly dissolved sherbets made of pistachio-nuts. Lady Hester refused the pipe which was offered her; she was later on to smoke like a stove. By the aid of an interpreter, Mehemet Ali, who was a man of slight figure and richly dressed, talked with her for nearly an hour. This magnificent specimen of the English race was to fill him with admiration for a country which produced such women. Fascinated by her abnormal dimensions, attracted by the strength, the determination and the will which could be read on her haughty features, he compared her mentally to

those comical beings who peopled his harem and asked himself if humanity were not composed of men, women and Englishwomen—an intermediary sex. Moreover, he reviewed his troops before her and made her a present of a magnificent Arab stallion. However, the handsome Mamelukes so celebrated had disappeared in the horrible massacre of the preceding year. Abdah Bey, who was the flower of the Court, was unwilling to be behindhand and presented her with a thoroughbred. These two horses were sent later to England : one to the Duke of York, for whom Lady Hester had retained a kindly preference, the other to Viscount Ebrington, under the care of the servant Ibrahim. Bruce was not forgotten in this exchange of compliments and received a sabre and a cashmere.

The spring advanced, the amusements multiplied : opening of a mummy and extraction of a tooth in a perfect state of preservation by a French surgeon—foolish diversion !—Egyptian dancing-girls, excursions to the Pyramids of Gizeh under the escort of the Mamelukes.

At length, on May 11, 1812, the faithful friends of Lady Hester : Bruce and Pearce, who took a liking to the adventure, the doctor—who regretted already the amber-coloured Egyptian women, moulded in their chemises of blue cotton, Venuses tanned by the sting of a too ardent sun—embarked at Damietta for

Palestine, for Jerusalem. Two French Mamelukes, as bodyguards, with their syces, the English lady's-maid, a groom, three men-servants, a porter, followed.

And all this company was not too much to transport the six great green tents decorated with flowers, the numerous chests of palm-wood, light and tough, which contained all the outfit of the caravan to replace what had disappeared in the shipwreck off Rhodes.

CHAPTER IV

EXCURSION IN THE HOLY LAND

WHAT did Lady Hester intend to do in Syria and in Palestine ?

She did not intend to seek oblivion, for the necessity of getting herself talked about, and the thirst for a celebrity which she strove vainly to retain, formed part of her nature, and she never got rid of it.

She resembled closely her grandfather, Lord Chatham. She had not only his grey eyes, which anger darkened strangely, and of which no one was able, at that time, to stand the glance, but also the inexorable will, the terrible passions, the continuous tension of the mind in the direction of one single object without troubling about the obstacles to be overthrown or the means employed to conquer them.

Grattan, in the curious portrait which he has traced of the first Pitt, wrote : " The Minister was alone. Modern degeneracy had not touched him. An old-fashioned inflexibility governed this character which knew neither how to alter nor to become supple. . . . Creator, destroyer, reformer, he had received from Heaven all that

was required to convoke men into a social group, to break their bonds or to reform them. . . .” Lady Hester had inherited these astonishing gifts, which her unconventional education had still further strengthened. Under the eyes of her frightened governesses who had abandoned the impossible task of making her a young girl like the others, without the knowledge of her father and her stepmother, who, besides, were not interested in the matter, she sprouted forth luxuriantly. In the same way as her figure and her “little” foot, never constrained, developed magnificently, her luminous intelligence, her originality, her energy, her rough clear-sightedness forcibly asserted themselves. Never contradicted, she might be proud of her qualities and of her extraordinary faults, proud also of that indomitable character which she had alone formed and which never inclined before anyone, ignorant at once of the art of changing principles or that of humouring public opinion by half-loyal measures or proceedings.

Amongst all those wonderful women in which the eighteenth century, according to Burke, was so fertile, Lady Hester Stanhope has a place apart. The Duchess of Rutland, the Duchess of Gordon, the Duchess of Devonshire, Mrs. Bouverie, the Marchioness of Salisbury, Mrs. Crewe, Lady Bessborough, Lady Liverpool and many others, who had on their side fortune,

beauty, charm, fascination and grace, cannot be compared to her. Morally and physically, Lady Hester is outside the picture. She is the echo, not only of the feminine character of her time, but of the characteristic tendencies of her age. Preoccupation with the Eastern problem, misanthropy, taste for action, hatred of hypocrisy, love of social questions and contempt for the people, were imperfectly embodied, but they were embodied all the same.

Her misfortune was to be a woman. So long as her uncle Pitt had been near her, she had been able to imagine that she had changed her sex. She had lived, acted and thought as a man, but as a man who would have been a beautiful woman and whom the admiration of the crowd retains far from the combats of politics and the struggle of life.

William Pitt had certainly been, according to the admirable phrase of Mirabeau, "the Minister of Preparations." He had seen the French Revolution approaching, and long before all others he had understood the danger of it. Joining then the fate of France—for which he entertained neither antipathy nor hatred—with that of the Revolution, he engaged England in that formidable struggle of which he could not foresee the issue. Killed by "the glance of Austerlitz," he died too soon to reap the fruit of his wonderful perspicacity. He died, above

all, too soon for Hester Stanhope, whose future he had not assured. There did not fail, certainly, statesmen behind whom a pretty woman was bestirring herself, champion of their policy, to cite only that charming Georgina Spencer, Duchess of Devonshire, who displayed in Fox's favour an indomitable energy, not fearing to splash about in the mud and kiss butchers with her patrician lips in order to exercise the omnipotence of her persuasion over the Westminster shopkeepers at the time of the famous elections of 1784. So well that Pitt was to write to Wilberforce, who was anxious: "Westminster is going well in spite of the Duchess of Devonshire and other women of the people, but it is not known yet when the voting will be finished."

But the statesman chosen was only a screen which permitted the spirit of intrigue which breathed amongst the great ladies of the English aristocracy to have free course. For Lady Hester, William Pitt was the reason of existence. When he disappeared, what was she able to do?

He said to his niece, after having lived a long time with her, that he did not know whether she were more at her ease in the whirlpool of pleasures and fêtes, in the perplexity of politics or in the most profound solitude. Sometimes, in fact, Lady Hester went into Society eagerly and

carried into the world her extraordinary brilliancy, her satire, humour and her biting wit, feared almost as much as the strokes of Gilray's pencil. Sometimes, she shut herself up with her uncle, serving him as secretary, astonishing him by the correctness of her judgment, by the comprehension and knowledge of men which this child of twenty years possessed, and without which the finest gifts of the understanding are reduced to sterility and do not descend from the domain of pure ideas to that of reality. Sometimes, she fled to Walmer Castle; and there, occupying herself in causing trees to be planted, in designing gardens, she bathed in silence and meditation. But now the world, she was surfeited with it! . . . She had just experienced the fragility of its infatuations. Politics! She was henceforth outside everything, and she had to witness the triumph of Pitt's enemies, the forgetfulness of his services. This power of money would have been necessary in order to struggle against the coteries of the drawing-room, the personal enmities which she had created. And she had only the pension of £1200 granted her in accordance with Pitt's last wish. There remained retirement. For the conquered, retirement is unendurable in the places which were witnesses of their past successes, unless they are surrounded by dear friends whose presence consoles them and makes them forget. Lord Camel-

ford, whom she had thought for a moment of marrying, had quarrelled with the Pitts over a matter of money; he had given his sister—which assuredly he had the right to do—an estate which Lord Chatham hoped to inherit. Sir John Moore had just been killed. She dreamed of far-off solitudes, and she thought of undertaking an expedition which would cover her name with glory and whose fame would reach England.

Horace Walpole, an unsparing critic of his contemporaries, said of Chatham that he was “master of all the arts of dissimulation, slave of his passions, and that he simulated even extravagance to insure success.” Under the smoke of gossip and tittle-tattle he hatches always a fire of truth. The second part of the portrait can apply as well to the granddaughter as to the grandfather. Lady Hester was enslaved by a redoubtable passion: ambition, and ambition without object. Well women incarnate almost always their aspirations, their desires, their admirations and their hatreds in living beings and real things: concrete which, after being the symbol of the abstract, is confounded with it to make only one. Lady Hester did not escape the common rule; solitude became little by little the means of getting herself still talked about; then became peopled by escorts, caravans and Arab chiefs; her ambition was not quicker

than hatred of her enemies and disgust of England, and she determined upon this journey across the unknown East, journey which would serve at once her need of solitude and of celebrity in astonishing the world. Only, she possessed—as much on the side of Pitt as of Stanhope—a slight taste for eccentricity. She had no need to simulate an extravagance, which was natural to her; she was inclined to do nothing like other people.

Unconsciously also, a mysterious reason urged Lady Hester to choose Syria, and particularly Jerusalem, for the theatre of her exploits. It was nothing less than a prediction of Brothers. A figure strange, this Brothers, who created a sensation towards the end of the eighteenth century.

A former lieutenant in the Navy, his imagination became disordered in meditating upon the most obscure passages of the Apocalypse; the endless leisure which voyages permit are truly pernicious for feeble minds. . . . He soon abandoned his career and modestly assumed the title of “Nephew of God and Prince of the Hebrews,” consecrating himself entirely to the divine mission which he believed he had received. He lived in an agreeable hallucination. “After which, being in a vision,” said he, “I saw the angel of God by my side, and Satan, who was walking carelessly in the streets of London.”

Even when quite mad the English preserve a sense of humour !

So long as Brothers contented himself with predicting the approaching destruction of London and the restoration of the Kingdom of Judea, the Government did not trouble, but the situation changed when the vague prophecies were transformed into imperious advice to the King :

“The Eternal God commands me to make known to you, George III, King of England, that immediately after the revelation of my person to the Hebrews of London as their prince, and to all the nations as their governor, you must lay down your crown, in order that all your power and your authority may cease.”

But no time was lost in sending this troublesome person to Bedlam. Before going, he bestirred himself so much and to such good purpose to obtain a visit from Lady Hester that this singular request reached the ears of Pitt's niece. Curious to make the acquaintance of the prophet, she hastened to accede to his wish. Brothers solemnly predicted to her that “she would go one day to Jerusalem, and would lead the Chosen People ; that on her arrival in the Holy Land there would be upheavals in the world and that she would pass seven years in the desert.” While she was rustivating at Brousse, two Englishmen, who were passing

through it and who knew the prophecy, amused themselves about her great future. "You will go to Jerusalem, Lady Hester," said they; "you will go. Esther, Queen of the Jews! Hester, Queen of the Jews!"

Did the coincidence of the names strike her, or did this programme fascinate her by its novelty? Did she consider Brothers as an inoffensive lunatic or as a visionary of genius? She was not yet the sorceress of Djoun, believing firmly in magicians and enchanted serpents. But many sensible men, such as William Sharp, who had even given to the world a fine engraving of the prophet, with these words: "Believing firmly that this is the man chosen of God, I have engraved his portrait," and as Mr. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, an Indian official and translator of the code of Gentoo laws, if it please you, had publicly proclaimed themselves his disciples.

However that may be, Lady Hester took, with the handsome Colonel Bruce, the road to Jerusalem, wearing the costume of the Egyptian Mamelukes: short bolero of red satin, purple tunic without sleeves, gallooned with gold, wide trousers of which the multiple folds had the thickness of drapery, cashmere shawl twisting like a turban around her head. All that formed a symphony of red, which blazed forth when she partially opened the great white burnous which hid her entirely during her ramblings on horse-

back. They only proceeded so far as Jaffa ; Jaffa which bathes the foot of its dirty houses in the sea, and which the pilgrims returning from Jerusalem, after the Easter festival, fill with confusion and noise, transforming the little dead town of fishermen into a comical fair in which all the idioms of creation are entangled.

They were received by the English consular agent. He was a person called Damiani, a compromise between the patriarch and the Italian merchant, but in which the patriarch held the upper hand, an active man of sixty, wearing a singular costume : an old Eastern robe of sky-blue, lined with ermine, dirty trousers from which burst out two grey legs, head-dress *à la française*, that is to say, hair worn in a thick iron-grey queue, and above all . . . above all, an immense three-cornered hat, polished by the years, soaked with sweat and dust since the Egyptian campaign. Three-cornered hat which was to amuse royally the Princess of Wales during her famous journey to Jerusalem, and which was to make Alphonse de Lamartine smile gently twenty years later.

Mohammed Aga, Governor of Jaffa, believing that it was an affair of some pious lady of little importance, was hardly civil and did not facilitate in any way the organisation of the caravan. Lady Hester never forgave him.

On May 18, 1812, eleven camels and thirteen

horses left the town, conveying the travellers, save Pearce, who was keeping apart. By Gudd and Ramle they made their way towards the Holy City. It was harvest-time. Armed with short reaping-hooks, the peasants cut the barley, fresh barley which formed in the arid landscape islets of shade and points of velvet on which the eye lingered. Naked gold-coloured children followed the horses to offer some ears of corn in exchange for a serious backsheesh, and the doctor, in throwing them the piastres, declared sadly that no people knew better how to extort presents.

The mountains assumed a severe aspect. The path plunged into the rock like a nail into a wall. They reached a village amongst the fig-trees, where they were courteously received by the king of the mountain, the great sheik Abu Ghosh, who held in his hands the keys of Jerusalem. Detested by the surrounding pachas, feared by the travellers, he lived in independent existence in the midst of his hardy and brave mountaineers. Imposing dues at his pleasure upon the caravans, holding the pilgrims to ransom, levying taxes upon the convents, compelling the monks to bring out their little savings, he reigned without dispute over the mountains of Judea, from Ramle to Jerusalem, from Hebron to Jericho. Abu Ghosh was one of the most astonished of men to see a European woman arrive, surrounded

by so numerous a suite, mounted on excellent horses. Ordinarily, the travellers contented themselves with wretched animals and clothed themselves in rags to pass unnoticed. The sheik, delighted to make the acquaintance of an English princess and fascinated by the haughty dignity of her manners, treated her very well. His four wives hastened to cook a delicate supper: vine-leaves filled with meat, stuffed pumpkins, roast mutton, chicken swimming in an ocean of boiled rice.

And the doctor thought sadly that this modest repast was the highest point of the culinary art of the Arabs.

When night came, Abu Ghosh installed himself with his pipes and his wives at the corner of the fire and watched over the sleep of the woman who had committed herself to his care. Early in the morning they separated as friends, and one of the sheik's brothers protected Lady Hester so far as Jerusalem.

Monotony of a poor land, and all at once, like a town of clouds, an apparition of the Middle Ages, loopholed walls and belfries, belfries and cupolas! . . . After having vigorously driven away the dragomans of the Franciscan monastery who clung to them tenaciously, and pointed them out in advance to Turkish cupidity, Lady Hester wandered into Jerusalem as her fancies dictated.

Accompanied by twenty horsemen, she made her way to Kengi-Ahmed, governor of the town. The seraglio partly opened its grated windows, eyelids closed by an unconquerable sleep on the Mosque of Omar, the holy mosque with its Persian and blue mosaics surrounded by gardens of cypress-trees. She went to the Holy Sepulchre, and her visit was not characterised by the meditation usually associated with a pilgrimage, not even with a pilgrimage undertaken for artistic purposes. The monks had, contrary to their custom, closed the doors of the church. They solemnly opened them and came in procession to meet her carrying lighted candles. The crowd, curious to see the spectacle, collected and vociferated in chorus. The police kept it at a distance by blows from cudgels. Lady Hester relieved the necessities of a Mameluke who had escaped the previous year from the Cairo massacre. When Emin Bey—that was his name—had heard the first shots fired by the Albanian soldiers massed on the walls, when the great slaughter had begun, he had comprehended that his only chance of safety lay in headlong flight. Then he had driven his spurs into his horse's flanks, and raising the animal, which was rearing and neighing with terror, he had leaped from the platform facing the citadel to the foot of the ramparts—a leap of forty-five or sixty feet. He had afterwards succeeded in reaching Jerusa-

lem by the desert, not without having been first overpowered and robbed by the guides who conducted him. Since that time he had stooped to live on alms.

She sauntered in the infamous alleys of the Ghetto (Was it necessary to facilitate Brothers' task ?), meeting children oldish-looking and shrivelled, the Jews of Central Europe with their orange-coloured greatcoats, wearing their tall skin caps and their abject air.

On May 30, Lady Stanhope, after a visit to Bethlehem, village of Judea, over which hover the glad memories of the Christ, where long lines of women defile like shadows, wearing with serene gravity their horned head-dresses and their trailing blue robes, reached St. Jean d'Acre by way of Atlitt beach, on which are engulfed the last vestiges of Pelerin Castle, and Haifa in the shadow of Mount Carmel. The road soon became more frequented. It was marked out by carcasses. It seemed a giant abattoir. Dead horses, of which the inhabitants of the town had got rid ; camels which had fallen exhausted on returning from a distant journey ; sick asses despatched on the spot. From this charnel-house issued an acrid and warm odour which turned the stomach. As the caravan passed, clouds of blue flies buzzed by in clusters, and yellow dogs fled growling and watched from a distance these intruders who came to share in their festival banquet.

The sun burned with a malicious pleasure these heads half gnawed away, these eviscerated bodies, this greenish flesh. And the old bones, already picked clean by the jackals and washed by the rains, sparkled here and there, like great white flowers on the fields of corruption.

CHAPTER V

IN THE COUNTRY OF DJEZZAR PACHA AND THE EMIR BECHIR

ST. JEAN D'ACRE stretches out into the sea like a greyhound which stretches himself lazily in the sun. The tiny harbour seemed to have been scooped out to satisfy the caprice of some royal child. The mosque, Jama-el-Geydd, darted towards the sky, throwing like an imperious prayer its threatening minaret, and the multitude of the palm-trees crowded around it. And when the evening brought the sea breeze, they lamented and moaned like men, and the hushed waters in their marble fountains wept in distant echo in the sacred court. This mosque was one of the most beautiful of the Syrian coast, the antique débris of Ascalon and Cæsarea having covered with diversified mosaics, porphyry and jade the walls and floor. Amidst the verdure of the inner gardens roamed in a blaze of red and yellow flowers, the basins of painted earthenware, the santons and the tombs.

Lady Hester was the guest of Mr. Catafago, a personage in Syria, whom his title of agents of Europeans, his trading and his riches, had

rendered celebrated. With his intelligent and keen countenance, his air of authority, his flashing eyes, this man had acquired an extraordinary ascendancy over the Arabs and the Turks. It was he who facilitated Lamartine's journey in the Holy Land, and rendered it, if not comfortable, at least possible.

Lady Hester, in strolling through the town, was astonished to meet a number of people with faces atrociously mutilated. Some had no nose; to others a ear was wanting, sometimes two; several were one-eyed. Puzzled, she made inquiries of Hadji Ali, a janissary of St. Jean d'Acre, whom she had promoted to the high rank of inspector of the luggage. Former soldier of Djazzar Pacha, he had his memory haunted by nightmare visions, and related concerning his master ghastly stories. Although he had been dead for four years, the inhabitants were hardly beginning to emerge from the Red Terror under which they had lived and to breathe more freely. Ahmed Djazzar was born in Bosnia. At the age of sixteen he left Bosnia and went to Constantinople, and afterwards to Cairo. There, bought by Ali Bey for his Mamelukes, he specialised with so much enthusiasm in missions of assassination that he acquired his redoubtable surname of Djazzar (slaughterer). Having, by chance, refused to put to death a friend of Ali, he took to flight to escape his vengeance.

He made his way to the Druses, where he received hospitality from the Emir Yusef, who appointed him Aga, then governor of Bairout. Djezzar betrayed him. Yusef, furious, made an alliance with Dahers, sheik of one of the Arab tribes of the coast. Besieged in the town, Djezzar defended himself like a devil, walled up twenty Christians alive in his walls to render them more solid, and surrendered finally to Dahers, who, fascinated by his courage, gave him his friendship and the command of an expedition to Palestine. Unhappy idea ! Djezzar went over to the Turks again. And, a little later, a war having broken out between the pachas of Syria and the Porte, he was ordered to reduce St. Jean d'Acre. His knowledge of the country having assured success, he surprised Dahers and killed him with his own hand.

Appointed afterwards pacha of Acre and Sidon, then of Damascus, he was able to abandon himself without restraint to his sanguinary tastes and to his love of butchery. Traitor to his country, to his benefactors, sold to the highest bidders, vile and dishonourable, he lived peacefully until the age of eighty-eight, when the dagger of a relative of one of his numerous victims came to put an end to his exploits.

Amidst the annals of Turkish history, so heavy with murders and cruel massacres, so stained with blood, so filled with the lamentations of

thousands of unhappy people put to torture, Djazzar's reign shone with a singular brightness.

Hadji Ali showed Lady Hester the pavilion which Djazzar Pacha usually occupied. He used to have his divan placed near the window and to watch the street. Did he catch sight of a passer-by whose face, clothing or figure displeased him, he sent to fetch him. If the unhappy man attempted resistance, the officer, who did not care to incur his master's anger, used force. When he was brought, more dead than alive, before Djazzar, the latter said to him : " Thy face does not please me," or, " Thou hast an evil eye," or again, in turning towards the executioner, who followed him like his shadow : " A fellow so ugly is unworthy to live ; he is surely a child of the devil." And for love of art he caused ears, noses and heads to be cut off.

Sometimes he showed an amiable caprice. His guards having arrested all the persons who were passing along the principal street of St. Jean d'Acre at a certain hour, he had them drawn up on either side of his divan, indiscriminately, and after having gloated for a time over their mortal agony, he pronounced sentence in an indifferent voice : " Let the prisoners on the right be hanged and let an ample breakfast be provided for those on the left ! "

One day, when the barber, who was ordered to pluck out an eye from a passing stranger, hesitated for a moment, Djazzar said : “ Oh ! Oh ! thou art squeamish ! Perhaps, it is because thou knowest not how to do it. Come here ; I am going to teach thee.” And the pacha, plunging the forefinger of his right hand into the orbit, threw the man’s eye on to his face.

The recital of such atrocities would pass for a tale in the style of Bluebeard if the slashed faces of hundreds of men did not attest the frightful reality of it. It is useful for the moment to show how the varnish of Eastern civilisation cracks to allow us to catch a glimpse of the abysses of cruelty and barbarism unknown to European mentality.

St. Jean d’Acre was at that time the only town in Syria where the shopkeepers were not tempted to rob their customers or to use false weights and false measures. Caught in the act, they were, in fact, nailed by the tongue to the doors of their shops. The butchers enjoyed favourable treatment : they were suspended from the crooked iron hooks intended to suspend the choice morsels.

But the recollection the most horrible, which still caused the narrator to lower his voice, as though the terrible pacha was concealed in order to listen to him, was that of the Mameluke mutiny.

Djezzar, as Pacha of Damascus, had every year to escort the pilgrims to Mecca. He had brought with him half his Mamelukes, about two hundred. The others remained at St. Jean d'Acre under the command of his Khasnadar, who had been appointed regent in his absence. Well, the white beauties of his harem—they numbered a hundred, it was whispered—became very bored, and the eunuchs, relaxing their vigilance, the Mamelukes forced the doors of the women's apartments. The Khasnadar reserved for himself the pacha's favourite, Zulyka. Hardly had the pacha returned than he found in the ladies of his harem a perceptible change. From observation to suspicion was but a step, which Djezzar quickly took. The attitude of the Mamelukes appeared to him suspicious, and he resolved to make an example which would in future prevent the most bold from attempting his honour.

In order to separate the innocent from the guilty, he ordered Selim, the Khasnadar's brother, to assemble the troops at Khan Hasbeiya, giving as a pretext an expedition against the Emir Yusef. The Hawarys, the Arnauts, the Dellatis, all the garrison of the town, rejoined their concentration camps. The two hundred Mamelukes, whom he had mentally sacrificed, alone remained at St. Jean d'Acre. Proof alone was wanting. Chance undertook to furnish him with it.

Happening to be one day near the famous window, he saw an old man who, with a nosegay in his hand, knocked at the door of the harem and handed it to a slave. Well, flowers are, in the East, the language of love; letters and messengers are too dangerous to make use of, and carnations, lilies and roses serve as *billets-doux*. On entering the women's apartments, Djezzar saw the nosegay in the hands of the charming Zulyka.

A new *Methridates*, he compelled Momene to confess her love.

"Come here, little girl," said he to her; "where didst thou get that nosegay?"

She replied very quickly:

"I gathered it in the garden."

The pacha assumed an indulgent air.

"Come, come!" he rejoined, "I am better informed than thee. I saw the Christian Nummun who was bringing it. Tell me, my child, who is thy lover, and I will see if I can give thee him in marriage. I intend to find a husband for thee."

The imprudent Zulyka took him seriously and mentioned the Khasnadar's name.

Then, changing countenance, Djezzar rushed upon her and, seizing her by the hair, dragged her to the ground.

"Wretch!" cried he, "confess the truth. Thou hast already avowed thy crime, and only

the denunciation of thy accomplices can still save thee."

In vain Zulyka protested and cried out that she was innocent. With a blow of his scimitar he cut off her head.

An order was given to four Hawarys soldiers, who went into the harem and began their work of death. At the shrieks of the women, the Mamelukes, who were in the courtyard of the seraglio, understood that something serious was happening. Seizing their arms, they shut themselves up in the Khasnadar's apartments, which formed an isolated tower, provided with doors studded with iron and solid bars to protect the treasure. They blocked up all the outlets and waited.

It was then that the drama grew serious. Djazzar, furious, summoned them to evacuate the place. Their reply was frank.

"We belong to thee, it is true. But thou hast so often steeped thy hands in human blood, and thou art so thirsty for ours, that our resolution is irrevocably taken."

And as the powder magazine communicated with the treasury, they added :

"If you attempt to dislodge us, we shall defend ourselves until our ammunition is exhausted, and then we shall set fire to the powder. And our death will be followed by the fall of Djazzar and the destruction of St. Jean d'Acre. But if you

allow us to depart safe and sound, we shall abandon all idea of vengeance, and you will never hear our names mentioned again.”

The pacha fell into a violent rage; some women he caused to be thrown into a trench filled with quicklime; others were sewn up in sacks and cast into the sea. The inhabitants lived in mortal terror and burrowed in their houses.

One night, the Mamelukes, taking the ropes which bound the ingots of gold, and sawing through the bars, succeeded in effecting their escape, not without having made a large breach in the treasury. Exhausted, breathless, their clothes in rags, their hands stained with blood, they arrived at Khan Hasbeiya. Horrified at the sight they presented, Selim hastened to take his brother's side. The rebellion spread from place to place, and all the troops rose in revolt against Djezzar. Allying themselves with the Druses of Yusef, they seized Sidon and Tyre and marched on St. Jean d'Acre. Djezzar's situation was critical; but, though abandoned by all, he remained firm as a rock. His counsellors, whom his approaching fall incited to courage, urged him to abdicate in order to save the town from the sufferings of a siege.

“Go, my friends, God will arrange everything,” replied he in a bantering tone, “and I shall have at some not distant day the pleasure of thanking you for your prudent counsels!”

Understanding the part which morale plays even in the best organised army, he spread, by the aid of emissaries and spies cleverly instructed, ideas of defeat in the enemy's camp.

By cunning speeches he gained over to his cause some inhabitants of Acre who were fit to bear arms, and mingled them with the workmen constantly employed on the public works. He collected thus a little force which surprised and overthrew the assailants. The Mamelukes fled beyond the seas. Djazzar completed the glutting of his wrath by causing the women who had escaped the massacres to be flogged. They were then thrown naked into the bottom of the hold of a ship and sold in the slave markets of Constantinople. The trees of the garden were cut down, and even the cats of the harem were not spared in the general slaughter. Never had Djazzar better deserved his name. Then tranquillity returned to the town.

And then one day one of those famous Mamelukes had the audacity to return to the palace. His name was Soliman. Djazzar recognised him immediately, and his features assumed such an expression of rage that all the officers present turned pale and instinctively closed their eyes.

The pacha brandished his axe.

"Wretch!" cried he. "What have you come to do here?"

“To die at thy feet, for I prefer that fate to that of living at a distance from thee.”

The axe flashed in the light.

“You know well, however, that Djezzar has never pardoned ? ”

Soliman repeated his answer.

The weapon fell. Twice, thrice, the same words resounded in the frozen silence. Death prowled about the room. Those present held their breath as at the pillow of a man at the point of death.

At last the pacha threw down his axe and cried :

“Djezzar will have pardoned for the first time in his life.”

By one of those changes of fortune in which destiny delights, this same Soliman replaced Djezzar as Pachalic of Acre. And no doubt, because he had experienced the value of mercy, he showed himself as good and as just as his predecessor had been cruel and licentious.

There are, however, some traits in Djezzar's character which are marked by a certain humour. When his jests were not addressed to persons condemned to death or to victims whom he had just caused to be disfigured, they did not want for wit. Such was the answer which he gave to a Christian of St. Jean d'Acre.

A merchant lived with his son in a house situated on the seashore. The ground floor was

damp and unhealthy ; the first floor airy and dry. The father lived above, as was right, the son contented himself with the lower part. To be brief, the son wanted to get married, which was quite reasonable, and persuaded his father to lend him his apartments for a fortnight. To this the old man consented readily, but when, on the sixteenth day, his children showed no disposition to restore him his lodging, he hazarded a timid protest.

“ Allow us another week to enable my wife to get accustomed to the idea of going downstairs,” replied the young husband. But when the week had passed, and the occupants of the first floor made no more sign than the dead, the father, whose old bones were beginning to grow mouldy in this little enviable habitation, made another demand. The son sent him about his business and announced coldly that each of them would remain in future where he was, in which he was wrong.

Djezzar, whose intelligence service was admirably conducted, and who took pleasure in roaming himself about the town, under a disguise, like the caliphs of former times, learned about the matter.

The son was brought trembling to the palace.

“ Of what religion art thou ? ” roared the pacha in a voice of thunder.

The unhappy man was scarcely able to stammer that he was a Christian.

“ Well, show me the sign by which Christians recognise one another.”

The young man made the sign of the Cross, bearing his hand to his forehead, then to his breast : “ In the name of the Father, of the Son . . . ”

“ Ah ! ah ! ” exclaimed Djazzar in a bantering tone. “ It seems to me that thy religion teaches thee that the Father ought to be above and the Son below. Carry out the rules of thy faith, if thou dost wish that thy head remains on thy shoulders.”

And the father, brought back from his vault immediately, with the stains of mouldiness which covered his body duly brushed away, found himself in the dry without knowing the reason.

Lady Hester went to visit the Jew Malem Hazm, Soliman’s minister and banker. He was the fashion at St. Jean d’Acre ; he had only one eye and one ear and no nose. It was recognised that he had lived on terms of intimacy with the pacha. For his misfortune, he was, in fact, Djazzar’s secretary. The latter had always under his cushions a long list of people condemned to death, like another little game of society. In a moment of idleness, he inscribed there Malem Hazm’s name ; but, thinking better

of it immediately, he commuted the capital penalty to a few facial mutilations of little importance.

When the Jew reappeared with a countenance reduced to its most simple expression, Djezzar burst out laughing.

“In truth,” he exclaimed, “I should never have believed that thou wouldst have become so ugly. If I could have doubted it, I would have left thee thy nose.”

Then approaching him and laying his hand on his shoulder, he continued :

“Lucky Malem, you are my friend (he wrote, in fact, to the Porte skilful letters which, under the velvet of Oriental politeness, made them feel the threatening steel blade). Give thanks to God ! for were it not for the affection that I bear thee, I should have thy head cut off.”

It was a pleasant thing to be one of his friends. . . .

Mr. Catafago acted as interpreter. The conversation was the most cordial imaginable, and lasted until one o'clock in the morning. Lady Hester and Malem Hazm retired delighted with each other, and this good impression continued always. The Jew extolled the kindness of Soliman and inhaled, like fresh water, the great peace which enveloped St. Jean d'Acre.

Lady Hester went to visit Soliman. The reception was magnificent ; the compliments

in the best taste. On her return to Mr. Catafago's house, a grey horse, the gift of the pacha, was awaiting the visitor.

She liked also to saunter in the fortifications of the town. Of the three lines of ramparts which encircled it on the land side, the last was the work of Djezzar. Everything contributed to recall the memory of the sanguinary pacha. After the siege of St. Jean d'Acre by the French, understanding that he was indebted for safety to the aid of Sir Sydney Smith, he determined to become strong enough to defend himself and to be able to dispense with Allies, who are always an impediment. To realise his plan, which was formidable, years and hundreds of workmen enrolled by force were necessary. During those torrid afternoons on which the hapless wretches toiled under a leaden sky, Djezzar used to appear on the scene. Immediately, as if by enchantment, the tired stood erect, the movements of shovel and mattock became quicker, the picks buried themselves in the ground at shorter intervals. It seemed to all the workers that an immense jingle of bones filled the yard; the sight of the pacha conjured up chaplets of ears, necklaces of eyes, pyramids of heads. And if he uplifted his raucous and thundering voice, the most weary, the most worn out, became the most active, the most strong. Thus St. Jean d'Acre became a redoubtable fortress.

Through one of the embrasures, which made a sombre frame, Lady Hester perceived the sea of a royal blue colour, over which slender vessels skimmed. This sight recalled to her Sir Sidney Smith. The Commodore was not extraordinary, after all. Uncle Pitt had found him vain and puffed up with pride. Had he not pestered him for more than two hours with a box stuffed with papers, at a time when the Minister had so many things to do? Lady Hester was very near thinking that all heroes are thus, apart naturally from General Moore. . . . Forgetful of the charming compliments with which Sir Sydney Smith had bestowed on her on her entry into Society. "The roses and the lilies mingle on your face," said he at that time, "and the inexpressible charms of your attitude spread happiness around you." One could not be more gallant. But do not women remember particularly what has been said to them? Lady Hester considered it as the proof that one can be brave and a wretched politician. That happens, and even more often than one thinks.

Soon Mr. Catafago took Lady Hester to pass some time at Nazareth. The little town, twin sister of the towns of Umbria or Tuscany, dispersed in terraces its bright-coloured houses on the slope where cyprus-trees perched. And the Eastern sky possessed Italian charms.

Bruce brought back from an excursion to

Tiberias a fantastic Arab. He was no one less than the celebrated Burckhardt, Sheik Ibrahim as he had himself called. Tall, strong, shaped like a Hercules, with a broad German face, prominent eyes, badly placed teeth and an air of assurance, he displeased Lady Hester. He quitted Syria definitely for Egypt, after having travelled for two years over the unexplored regions of Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon and Hauran. None of Lady Hester's companions knew at that time that he was travelling on account of the Geographical Society.

In July, Lady Hester returned to St. Jean d'Acre to organise the departure. The caravan passed the gates of the town at sunset. The noise and the confusion were frightful. The majority of the Christian servants had never ridden on horseback ; and the horses, accustomed by their Arab masters to rear, dance, neigh and play a thousand tricks on leaving the villages, added to the confusion. Shouts from the drivers, yells of fright from the servants. . . . Mrs. Fry, the English lady's-maid, worried and ill at ease in her masculine habiliments, persisted in wishing to ride as an Amazon, at a time when all women in the East rode astride. The camels became entangled in their leading-reins and threw the line into disorder when it was scarcely re-established.

With time and blows, all was settled. The

doctor and the janissary Hadji Ali took the head of the march. In the darkness, beasts and men wandered from the torrent-bed which served as a track. Suddenly, noises and tumults in the rear; the camel carrying the medicine-case had just fallen into a ravine. He was got out again unhurt; but the doctor did not dare to open the box. Poor medicine-case, collected with great difficulty in Egypt to replace that lost off Rhodes, it had truly no chance!

The route seemed sometimes an alley in an English park, well sanded, bordered by green Aleppo pine-trees, alternating automatically with thickets of cactus, crested with roses and yellows, sometimes a path of rocks fit to break the bones. Ruins ended by being engulfed on the seashore. The road climbed interminably. From a rocky point they saw in the far distance Tyre like a little fishing barque stranded on the beach.

The slowness of the journey was full of charms. Sometimes they passed naked women who were washing their linen at the fountain and who, without being troubled the least in the world at the sight of them, carelessly turned their backs. They had just traversed the Nalsr and Kasimaze when five blind men emerged suddenly, holding each other by the shoulders and walking one after the other. These joyous fellows astonished them by their pleasant appearance and their merry air.

And in the evening they encamped on the margin of springs, sometimes in one of those sanctuaries dedicated to some unknown Moham-medan saint which the commercial sense of the Arabs has transformed into a café. Such was that of Kludder. The history of the occupier is too significant not to be related. This worthy son of Allah had a wife, old and of canonical appearance, who carried on the business admirably. He preferred to her a young and pretty girl, who, however, understood nothing about business. He therefore recalled the first and kept them both, joining thus the useful to the agreeable. For five years they shared the task of enriching him and amusing him.

Sidon was sleeping in its orchards of orange-trees when the travellers stopped at the entrance to the town. Between its two castles in ruins, of which one is expiring to the rhythm of the waves, it seemed a princess of "The Thousand and One Nights" guarded by two black giants. But the arches of the prison were infinite, and lamps of gold watched over her slumber.

Lady Hester and her people were lodged at the French caravanserai, prepared by the diligent attentions of the French consul, M. Taitbout. Scarcely were they installed there than an invitation arrived from the Prince of the Druses, the Emir Bechir, accompanied by twelve camels, twenty-five mules, four horses and seven foot

soldiers. The two sons of a merchant of Sidon, the brothers Bertrand, half-dragomans, half-doctors, were joined to the expedition. They had the quality of being interchangeable, and travellers never knew exactly with which they had to deal.

Rather unpleasant rumours were in circulation at Sidon in regard to the emir. He was born of Moslem parents, but practised in secret the Christian religion. He was a tyrant, said some, a hypocrite, said others. Worthy emulator of Djazzar, had he not just caused the eyes of his nephews, the sons of the Emir Yusef, to be torn out, because they ventured to compromise his power? He had had a magnificent palace built in the heart of the Lebanon. And, whispered the best informed people, there was in the great hall of Beit-ed-Din, a ceiling of such beauty that the delighted emir had, by way of recompense, caused the two hands of the artist to be cut off, in order that he might never be able to begin another. A protector of the arts rather out of the common!

By a narrow path which embraced the circuit of the Nahr-el-Damour, Bechir's escort guided Lady Hester towards Deir-el-Kammar (the convent of the moon), which they reached at night-fall. In the morning they had an elating spectacle: dominating the bounding waters of the torrent, clinging to the flanks of the mountain,

the palace stretched towards the sun, raising its flowering roofs, its white terraces, its towers, its arcades, its gardens, which fell back as though in despair at not having been able to kiss the sky and descended exhausted to the foot of the slope.

The doctor noted down briefly on his tablets :

“The palace is devoid of all beauty. It is new, but irregular ; it has not two parts alike, and it has been built in pieces and bits, in accordance with fancy or necessity, in accordance with leisure or money. The emir has made a present to Lady Hester of a fine horse, richly caparisoned.”

But the English find it difficult to admire what is not their fief. Scarcely twenty years later, Lamartine was to find other expressions to proclaim aloud his admiration. The lack of symmetry ! But it is that which ought to possess charm for lovers of the beautiful ! And what a wonderful view was this medley of square towers pierced by ogives, of long galleries with files of arcades slender and light as the stems of pine-trees, of graceful colonnades of unequal shape rearing themselves to the roofs. And the animation of the courts blooming with roses : pages throwing the djerid, arrival of camels, horses pawing the ground, comings and goings of Druses, Marionites, Metaoulis ! . . . The doctor saw nothing ; but it must be said in his defence that the palace had hardly been com-

pleted, and that in the East the stones, like the women, grow old quickly. The masonry crumbles to dust; the rain pierces the roofs; and the sun, like a skilful magician, gives to the crumbling façades the golden rust and the rose tint of very old ruins.

But what is unpardonable in the doctor for not having admired, is the site. Beit-ed-Din is the "Palace of the Waters," with the vaporous mists which mount from the torrent, with the fountains of its mysterious gardens, with the eternal murmur of the humid earth which chants its joy, and the countless cascades and the dropping of the spray which bathes in the dew, and the silvery foam of the numberless streams and frolicsome springs. And down there, at the extremity of the valley, the sea, which presents itself like a pearl at the bottom of a cup.

In the environs of Deir-el-Kammar, Lady Hester went to see another chief of the Druses whose authority and influence were very considerable, the Sheik Bechir. He occupied the Palace of Moukhtara, and the doctor, who had more taste for feminine beauty than the poetry of nature, remarked that his wife was beautiful and his children charming.

These villages of the Lebanon, peopled by Druses, were silent and sad. The children even appeared grave. The men, robust mountaineers, with ruddy complexions, wore the

black and white abaye and the immaculate turban with narrow and symmetrical folds. The women, strongly built and rather common-looking, save for their eyes, which were perfectly beautiful, displayed a picturesque costume : blue dress open at the neck and on the bosom, which it left entirely uncovered ; embroidered trousers, and, above all, on the head, a strange edifice simulating a horn. A high cone of silver, of copper or of pasteboard, according to the conditions, bent backwards and veiled by a muslin handkerchief which fell back over the shoulders, and which the wind caused to float gracefully. They concealed it with a jealous care, replying to the travellers who proposed to buy it from them that they would prefer to part with their heads. Love carried so far that they did remove it even to sleep and combed themselves until Doomsday. From their hair hung three silken cords decorated with green, blue or red tassels.

Lady Hester, wishing to see, with her own eyes, if the Druses eat raw meat, as she had been told many times, bought a sheep and collected some villagers. The guests, feeling themselves the object of the assembly, added no doubt many supplementary grimaces and gluttonous attitudes, which left the doctor under a bad impression. It did not prevent the sheep from disappearing in the twinkling of an eye, including the tail, which was large and greasy.

The doctor had lost his servant, who, inconsolable for having left the onions of Egypt, had gone back to his own country. One morning, when he was lamenting his loss on his doorstep, he saw appear a long raw-boned individual, thin and dried up, dressed in sombre garments and exhibiting a turban of doubtful black. This new-comer, in a French seasoned with a Gascon accent, offered himself with eloquence as valet, cook, guide and interpreter. Bewildered, the doctor succumbed beneath the torrent of words, the vigorous gestures, the expressive mimicry, while examining the pointed and angular outline, the bony and deeply-lined face, the cavernous and bright eyes. Curiosity aiding necessity (the caravan was on the eve of starting for Damascus), he engaged this extraordinary person. The information which he gathered in the village was favourable enough. Pierre is mad, they told him, and everyone knows that in the East madness is of no importance.

This worthy fellow came of a good family of Marseilles : marquises and marchioness or something of that kind, but which had for a very long time been established in Syria. One of his uncles, having business with the Government, brought him when quite a child to France. One day, while he was walking at Versailles, chance brought him across the path of Louis XVI. The King and *Monsieur*, struck by his Oriental

costume, and perhaps also by his agitated manner, spoke to him of the countries of the Levant. All the vanity and the boastfulness of the South, which a long succession of ancestors had dimly implanted in him, mounted to his head, and he derived enormous advantage from this interview. He brought back to Syria a stock of magnificent histories, of which he was naturally the hero, and notions of French and of cookery in which the provincial, after all, predominated. When Bonaparte came to lay siege to St. Jean d'Acre, he rendered some services as interpreter and accompanied the French into Egypt, where he remained until their departure. He obtained a pension, which the Government forgot to pay him. It was then that God bestowed upon him the gift of prophecies. Melancholy gift, which no one desires. He returned to Deir-el-Kammar believing firmly in the resurrection of his unhappy country. Not understood by his friends, scoffed at by his neighbours, despised by his relatives, he lived pitifully until the news of the arrival of an English princess ran through the Lebanon like a train of gunpowder. Then he realised that his destiny was there; he took his wallet and his staff, and deserted his wife (who was no doubt ugly), to follow the unknown. In the evening, by the camp fires, he achieved extraordinary success with the account of his adventures. He used to begin invariably :

“ When General Bonaparte formed a corps of Mamelukes, I enrolled in it with a great number of Syrians, my friends. As soon as we had been trained in the handling of arms, we were sent into Upper Egypt to join General Desaix’s division. One day, after vainly pursuing the enemy who fled from us, we arrived very tired on the border of the desert and encamped. I was on the main guard of the camp, and, towards the middle of the night, when all the fires were extinguished, I heard a hyena howl in a strange manner, and at some distance from there the young camels raised distressing moans. The sky was entirely covered. Suddenly, I distinguished a sound, which seemed to be advancing towards me. It was at first only a murmur. I listened, and I heard distinctly the words :

“ ‘ Pierre, Pierre, the Arabs will have a King and a Queen ! ’

“ This prodigy filled me with fright ; and while I sought to recover my senses, the same words struck my ear and carried trouble into my soul. The dreams of the night recounted to me magnificent triumphs and royal fêtes.

“ On the morrow I related to my companions what I had heard ; but no one was inclined to attach any faith to my words.

“ Since that day I have spoken of these things to many men ; I have endeavoured to move

their hearts to seek by what way the hope might be able to enter them. But the men have only jeered at me ; they received my prophecy with insults.

“ I returned then to my own country. I married ; but nothing was able to snatch from my heart the hope which God had placed there ; only I had hidden it in myself as a precious treasure which I feared to see misunderstood. Then I heard it related that a great princess of Europe had arrived in Syria, and I recognised the Queen whom the prophecy had announced to me.”

And Pierre embroidered with fertility and imagination on this unique theme.

Lady Hester heard people talking of the doctor's strange recruit. Amused by the extravagant tales of the former soldier of Bonaparte, secretly flattered at seeing ascribed to her a part of the first importance, a situation of which she was very fond, disturbed also by the remembrance of the predictions of Brothers, she caused the “ cook-prophet ” to enter her service. But had she not already foreseen that she would be able to make use of him, or another ? The sovereigns of the West had buffoons at their Courts who made the mob laugh ; the pachas of the East had prophets who made it fear. And there is there a symbol which did not want for realism. Lady Hester, who was looking for a

corner of the earth where she could play the petty potentate, procured a precious auxiliary to impose her wishes on the people, willingly credulous when the Korbach is behind. And Pierre was placed in reserve for a favourable opportunity. He accompanied the traveller for seven years.

CHAPTER VI

FAR NIENTE AT DAMASCUS

ON August 27, 1812, Lady Hester had left Deir-el-Kammar, edified on the subject of Eastern hospitality. The Emir Bechir had supplied all the requirements of her table with great magnificence, it is true, but had caused a hint to be conveyed to her, by one of his intimates, that he expected a present of equivalent value. It cost her 2000 piastres, pieces of brocade and gratuities to all the servants, from the major-domo to the meanest scullion, and they formed a tribe! She left disgusted by an invitation which had cost her so dear. As for the horse with which Bechir had presented her, one which the doctor had admired, he was vicious, and Lady Hester got rid of him, to the profit of the janissary.

Bruce, in company with one of the two Bertrands—one does not know which—had started for Aleppo, after having uselessly endeavoured to take his friend. Lady Hester screened her refusal behind her contempt for the Levantine race, neither Turkish nor European, which inhabited this town. The true

reason was much more personal : she simply was afraid of catching the Aleppo pimple, that facetious ulcer which chooses as a rule a prominent part of the face, nose or cheek, to lay there its hideous scar. A woman, even though she wears breeches, attaches importance to her face. And this little weakness brings Lady Hester nearer to her poor sex. . . . She had written to the Pacha of Damascus to inform him of her desire to visit his capital, and he had sent her a page with a most courteous invitation.

Was not Damascus the Porte of the Desert, and had not Lady Hester already the project, still vague as to the means, but certain as to the end, of making a little stay amongst the wandering Bedouin tribes ?

The caravan journeyed slowly ; the news which the page had brought did not stimulate rapidity ; there was revolution at Damascus, where the commandant of the troops had refused to recognise Sayd Soliman, the new pacha. He was shut up in the citadel, and blood was flowing in streams in the streets.

The travellers occupied four days in traversing the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon. Pierre's stories diverted the evenings. In proportion as they climbed, the air was charged with aromatic effluvia and icy breaths. At the summit of their route, they perceived all at once the plain of the Bekaa, which, like a long serpent, unrolls its green

rings, writhes and lies down between two mountain barriers. The Litami traced a furrow of sombre tint, and the plain with its fresh herbage was a pleasure to behold. The parallel tops of the two Lebanons were tawny and red; the parched earth was cracking under the midday heat. And to the South, Hermon rose victoriously, like a great sherbet, to the eternal snows on the plateau glittering with light. To the North, a jet of light, which Lady Stanhope recognised as Baalbeck: the temple of the sun was saluting its god.

At last, excellent news arrived from Damascus: the rebel age had been strangled and order was entirely restored. After halts at the village of Djbb-Djenin and Dimas, the travellers stopped at the gardens of Damascus. The gardens of Damascus! Fêtes and orgies of apricot-trees, orange-trees and pomegranate-trees, succumbing beneath the exuberance of the vines, whose heavy and juicy grapes fell so far as the ground. The river with its seven branches chanted the joy of living, and the song of the waters was full of voluptuousness, refreshing and boundless.

The doctor started in advance to prepare the way and to hire a house in the Christian quarter. Then he returned, thoughtful, to meet Lady Hester. Thoughtful! There was occasion for it.

Damascus was still a town closed to Europeans. The fanaticism was freely developed and im-

posed its laws on the governors too benevolent towards foreigners. The length of the Syrian coasts, the relations of commerce, to which the Arabs attached extreme importance owing to the profit which they derived from it, and the authority of the consuls—whom they believed powerful and supported by their countries—had brought a certain tolerance. But Damascus, forbidden fruit, was concealed far inland, guarded by the double ramparts of the Lebanon, by solid walls, and particularly the desert, which came to die at its feet like a silent sea.

The few travellers who had visited it, and whom Lady Hester had met at Cairo or in the towns of the coast, had strongly dissuaded her from attempting an adventure of which the result might be tragic and which certainly would remain perilous.

“Think,” said they to her, “that a man cannot even enter Damascus in European costume without being insulted. Think that the Christians, if they dared to ride on horseback in the streets of the town, would be maltreated to such a degree that death would be the consequence. And you intend, you, a woman, a European, to enter Damascus on horseback and with your face uncovered! But it is madness!”

The pacha’s page had on several occasions hinted to the interpreter, one of the two Ber-

trands, that Lady Hester ought to veil herself to enter Damascus in order to avoid irritating the populace. For, in case of a riot, he knew well that the pacha, whose authority was much disputed, would not be able to afford her protection.

M. Bertrand nearly succumbed with horror on learning from the mouth of her ladyship herself that it was her intention to brave Damascene opinion by exhibiting herself in this costume, and in broad daylight.

Lady Hester was courageous. The unforeseen, even charged with threats, smiled upon her. And, above all, she was able to accomplish something great which no one had ever attempted before her. Pitt's niece had always turned up her nose at whatever people might say.

"Whatever people may say of me in England, I do not care more than that," declared she to the doctor, snapping her fingers. "Whatever horrible things all these crooked-minded persons may think, do not trouble me more than if they spat at the sun. That falls back on their noses and all the harm is for them. They are like midges on the tail of an artillery horse. They murmur, and they come and go, and they buzz all around. The great explosion comes! boom! and all are dispersed."

Only she knew well that the Moslems are not satisfied with buzzing and murmuring, and that

they would not recoil before bloodshed to obtain vengeance upon her who dared thus to defy their most sacred customs. But is there not at the bottom of the actions which appear the most heroically disinterested a certain sentiment of the gallery which stimulates vanity and renders it more bold? And if one had told Lady Hester that the fame of her exploits would never reach England, would she not have recoiled at the last moment.

On September 1, at four o'clock in the afternoon, Lady Hester passed the gates of Damascus at the head of eighteen horsemen and some twenty mules heavily loaded. In the narrow streets a considerable crowd gathered. It hurried towards the cavalcade, and all eyes were turned towards the person who appeared to be the chief of it.

The pacha's page was uneasy; M. Bertrand trembled, and the doctor was not in high spirits. A word, a cry, a gesture, and the people who surrounded the escort had only to draw their thick ranks closer, and the travellers would have been delivered to them defenceless. But, deceived by the dazzling costume and the masculine countenance of Lady Hester, some took her for a young bey still beardless; others, believing that they were dreaming, discovered that it was a woman; but before they had recovered from their astonishment, she had already passed.

Thus she alighted safe and sound in the Christian quarter.

It is then that her indomitable character asserted itself; she did not rest until her household had been transported into the heart of the Mohammedan quarter. "I intend to take the bull by the horns and to settle down under the minaret of the grand mosque," declared she cavalierly to the doctor, who was very troubled at this new caprice.

Scarcely forty-eight hours after her arrival, furnished with an order from the pacha, she visited, without putting herself to inconvenience, the best residences in the town, and fixed her choice upon a sumptuous habitation near the palace and the bazaars, formerly the residence of a Capugi Bachi (envoy of the Porte for confidential missions, such as strangulations, confiscations and so forth). A narrow passage led to a marble court, where two bronze serpents, coiled around a lemon-tree, diffused water clear as crystal. The apartments were small and sumptuous.

The Christian owner of the empty house, his appetite excited by the sight of Lady Hester's suite, showed long teeth and a bill infinitely longer still. The smallest glass of lemonade was thus marked: "Sherbet for the arrival of the Queen." The doctor was obliged to curb his enthusiasm.

Lady Hester inaugurated very quickly her new Eastern policy, which was to flatter the Turks in order to make allies of them. Thus, the superiors of the Franciscan and Capuchin monasteries came to offer her their services, as they did to all passing travellers. And she caused them to be informed that, living in a Mohammedan quarter, she respected its rules, and begged them not to repeat their visit. The monks complied with this rather cool request.

She received, on the other hand, a French doctor, M. Chaboceau, seventy years of age, deaf as a post, who, entering all the harems, was not a little compromising.

This Chaboceau had known Volney at the time of his residence at Damascus ; he had even lodged him. And he energetically asserted that *Volney had not been at Palmyra*. A snowstorm had prevented him from undertaking his journey. This fact is curious, and renders rather piquant the *Méditations sur les ruines et les révolutions des empires*. Did Volney content himself with the descriptions of Wood and of Dawkins to inspire his emphatic invocations ? “The contemplation of solitudes which has aided him to interrogate the universality of people” may then be subject to some caution.

Thus, by radical measures, by discreet praises uttered before those who were able best to propagate them, by backsheesh skilfully dis-

tributed, she gained the good graces of the mob and became very quickly popular. When she mounted her horse, there was an assemblage before her door. Accompanied by little Giorgio, her interpreter, and her janissary Mohammed, she placed herself entirely at the discretion of the inhabitants during her rides through the town. At the beginning, the doctor feared a mishap, but he was reassured on beholding the respect which was caused by her proud and dignified bearing and her agreeable, if reserved, manner. Soon the fierce Damascenes felt themselves conquered. They sprinkled coffee under her horse's feet, in accordance with custom, in order to do her honour. Tempted by the piastres which she distributed as her smiles, they lay in wait for her departure and her return to shout as she passed: "Long life to her! . . . May she live to return to her own country!"

Admiration increased in the mob, which whispered in confidence that, although she was of English birth, she was descended from the Turks and had Mohammedan blood in her veins. Her paleness accredited the legend. Never had the lily whiteness of her skin and the clearness of her complexion been so much vaunted. Already in Egypt her moonlight face had conquered hearts. For the warm rosy carnation plays no part in Eastern beauty. The Turks regard the red faces of Englishwomen as hideous. In which

connection an amusing anecdote was related to Lady Hester :

During the evacuation of Egypt in 1805, the English soldiers forgot some women—as if by chance—whom the Turks seized. Their new lovers washed them and rewashed them, in the hope of removing that horrible brick colour which spoiled their cheeks. The result was worse. . . . The more they rubbed, the more flamboyant the colours became : tomatoes ready to fry. When they saw that there was nothing to be done, they sent them about their business. “ We know and we admire white and black women,” said they, “ but red women up to the present we have not heard them spoken of.”

One day, when she was passing through the *souks*, all the people rose at her approach, as at the passing of the Sultan. Her heart swollen with victorious joy, she advanced slowly, she advanced regretfully, into that fairyland, which was soon going to disappear for always. Shining silks, brocades wrought with salmon-pink roses, veils of Baghdad, cloths of Hama, damask with silver flowers, slippers of red leather, Arab saddles decorated with mother-of-pearl and tawny studs, carpets in warm and palpitating tones. . . . And, eagerly, she saw pass by, standing out on this strange scene like living chains which bound her to the dream, the tall Bedouins draped in their brown abayes, fierce of aspect and supple

as panthers of the jungle, the Jews with their dirty curls and their bent figures, hiding a clandestine booty from the tax-gatherer, the Turks, embroidered and re-embroidered with gold over all the seams, and the Christians, neutral and sad, and the Druses in half-mourning, and the Maronites. . . . From time to time an Aga broke through the crowd, with protruding chest, full-blown and fat body in his furred pelisse, like a pot of lard surrounded by dust, followed by fifteen slaves carrying his narghileh and his smoking apparatus. Long lines of veiled women under the guardianship of a duenna or of an old eunuch, flight of swans led by a duck.

It was Ramadan. So soon as the sun, in his daily farewell, had stained with blood the sand-dunes outside the town, life took possession of Damascus. Immediately the lamps were lit in the most beautiful mosques, for in this Orient which is all violence, shock and contrast one knows not the delicate charm of the mauve hours in which the twilight is born. Lady Hester sauntered through the crowded by-streets. The waters of the Barada reflected in commas of gold the illuminations of the little cafés which opened on to its steep banks. Songs rose from the *moucharabys*, whose distant lights traced the designs of legends. Behind a mysterious wall viols lamented, those seven-stringed viols which retain for a long time the melancholy notes.

The shops of the vendors of eatables were in a wild ferment : plates loaded with cakes dripping with honey and grease, juicy halawys, loaves flat as handkerchiefs, little skewers of birds roasted whole. On the threshold of his kingdom, naked down to the waist, a fat negro rolled without shame forcemeat balls on his belly. Odour of grilled mutton, of fresh pasties, of burned almonds, of ginger, of canella !

Tumult of buyers ! Confusion at the cross-ways ! Theatre of Chinese shadows recounting the inevitable story : illness of a lady, her desire to have a Frank doctor, thoughtlessness of the doctor, jealousy of the husband and speedy catastrophe.

In the cafés, the Damascenes, gravely squatting in a heap on rustic carpets, smoke the narghileh or suck in the tiny cups of coffee perfumed with ambergris. If the customers were thirsty, they stopped on his way a water-carrier, a djoullab seller or a vendor of raisins. Sometimes a storyteller presented himself and began a story of "The Thousand and One Nights," in which figured marvellous houris and one-eyed giants. He went, came, gesticulated, varying his voice with an infinite art, transforming the expressions of his face with a skill which the most famous of our actors would not attain. Sometimes they listened to him, sometimes he talked for himself alone, and his pleasure was as keen as though he

were playing before the Sultan. Ah! who will restore to Lady Hester those long luminous nights of Ramadan with the charm of new scenes and exotic perfumes never lost later?

One evening, Lady Hester was informed that the pacha awaited her. Rash enterprise for a woman who had a soul less firm. She passed with an assured step—with an assured stride—through the ante-chambers of the palace, where the flames of the torches shone on the weapons of the soldiers and the motionless guards. She entered an immense hall, walking through a double hedge of officers and janissaries in full dress, naked scimitars in their hands. Silence terrible and oppressive. The steel threw flashes of light. And, at the very end, on a sofa of crimson satin, a little man with an air haughty and glacial, who, without rising, signed to her to be seated. Lady Hester was in no way disconcerted, and all these glances of men, ardent and sombre, did not displease her. By her side stood the Jew Malem Rafael—brother of Malem Hazm—and M. Bertrand. Little Giorgio, who had been brought to check the translations of the interpreters, had been stopped at the door because he carried arms, a discourtesy as notorious as to wear boots on an official visit in England.

M. Bertrand was far from being as much at his ease as was his intrepid mistress. He would certainly have preferred to be the other Bertrand,

he who was travelling on the road to Aleppo; his teeth chattered with fear, and he was a long time before being able to speak intelligibly.

Lady Hester presented Sayd Soliman Pacha with a very valuable snuff-box, and withdrew at the end of a reasonable time, which seemed mortally long to her interpreter. The pacha sent her a horse shortly afterwards. After all these visits, her stable was beginning to be supplied.

Scarcely had she returned, when her janissary Mohammed said to her :

“Her ladyship’s reception has been great.”

“Yes, but all that is only vanity,” answered she.

“Oh, my lady !” cried he, delighted, “thou bearest on thy forehead the splendour of a king and the humility of a dervish at the bottom of thy heart.”

The doctor made the round of the harems of the town to physic the beautiful Turkish women. Every day his house was besieged by blind men imperiously demanding eyes; consumptives, a lung; lame men, a straight leg; hunchbacks, a flat back. Most of the time, these patients desired to catch a glimpse of Lady Hester, and, their curiosity satisfied, they went to throw into the Barada the doctor’s powders. But he had sick persons more serious. Ahmed Bey, of one of the most important families of

the town, son of Abdallah, ex-Pacha of Damascus, sent for him to attend his son, a little boy of thirteen, ugly, rickety and deformed, and afflicted with an intermittent fever. All the resources of the Damascene medical art had been employed without effect. He had been sewn up in the skin of a sheep which had just been flayed; he had swallowed powdered pearls; he had had his feet covered by still warm pigeons. All without result.

The doctor, who had his neglected cures on his mind, required pressing at first. Then he operated and succeeded in curing the poor child. The father, overjoyed, offered him a complete outfit for the bath; very costly robe of honour to be put on on leaving the water, coffee, pipes and sherbets. These thanks in the Eastern fashion were completed by a rustic fête in the orchards which skirt the Barada.

But the treasure, the jewel of Damascus, was Fatimah, flower of beauty without rival. Her body of pure and graceful outline bore, like a half-opened corolla, the head small and delicate, the face pale and ardent, in which the great shadowy eyes extended themselves mysteriously. And her black hair, of a velvety and bluish black, descended in tresses, entangled with diamonds and gold pesetas, so far as her bare feet. The doctor thought seriously for a moment of renouncing his faith to espouse this adorable

creature. Poor doctor! he was not made of the same stuff as a Turkish husband at the head of a riotous harem. Will he consider one day his astonished eyes and his sheeplike and gentle manner? In short, he remained on the border of danger. Lady Hester, on her side, associated with the Turks of rank. One of her friends received her in the midst of his harem: harem of a noble, four wives and three mistresses! None of these women were seated in the master's presence; they stood in a corner of the drawing-room, and did not mount the estrade on which he sat except to fill his pipe and serve his coffee. At dinner, they handed the dishes themselves, never speaking except when their lord asked them a question. "And yet," said Lady Hester, "he is one of the most charming and most agreeable men I know. Towards me he is very gentlemanly and as attentive and courteous as no matter who!" We suspect with what kind of eye these seven women must have regarded the intrusion of this gigantic foreign woman!

As she was visiting the wife of an effendi who had gathered together some fifty ladies to do her honour, the master all at once entered. They veiled themselves hurriedly, and he dispersed them with a brusque gesture. Remaining alone with Lady Hester, he told her that he had informed her dragoman, who shortly afterwards appeared. He kept her to supper in a marble

court with groves of orange-trees. Immense gold candelabra bore candles six feet high, and little lamps suspended in clusters from the arcades were mirrored in the water of the basin. Negroes, admirably trained, waited. The effendi talked about astronomy and sent for a bulky book, concerning which he asked a thousand questions.

Strange and very significant picture, that of this Turk forsaking his harem to converse with Lady Hester about the celestial constellations and to talk with her of unknown planets. Did it not seem to her that she was descending from one of those inaccessible stars! And what abyss can be more profound, what distance can be more immeasurable, than that which separates beings kneaded by centuries of civilisation from those in whom the barbarian still sleeps? He, who up to that time had regarded women under the different aspects of a desire unceasingly awakened and unceasingly satisfied, here is he learning in turn respect, admiration, deference, here is he beginning to catch a glimpse of the equality of the sexes and the parity of their complex intelligences!

Little Giorgio, on his knees for four hours, was dead-sleepy. "He kept me until nearly ten o'clock," says the delighted Lady Hester, "an hour after the moment when everyone was obliged to remain in his house under pain of

death (new decree of the pacha). All the doors were shut, but all opened for me, and they did not say a word to me."

Lady Hester had, however, another object than that of initiating the Turks into the feminist evolution. She wished to go to Palmyra—Palmyra, the far-off and fabulous town which slept in the heart of the sands, guarded by the burning steppes, without water and without life. "The Syrian desert has only one Palmyra, as the sky has only one sun." Caprice of the tourist and of the woman, adventurous taste for unbeaten tracks? indifference to or even love of danger? latent recollection of Brothers and the prophet Pierre? desire to defy the English travellers who had failed on the journey to Tadmor? And perhaps, plan secret and slowly matured of regulating and of blending together the wandering tribes of the Bedouins, of intriguing with the sheiks, of unravelling again the political skein, a skein short, knotted and entangled with Arab politics?

There are people who do not cease from imposing charity upon the poor; the needy—who cling to their life, dirty, laborious but independent, more than we think—are washed, scrubbed, brushed, nursed, taught, physicked, improved by force. Lady Hester was of the species—more rare happily—which is unable to see men scattered without wishing to group them, to liberate slaves

by force and to reform the world. This instinct of domination, this thirst for authority, this imperialism, she was going to satisfy without delay upon the defenceless Arabs. And then the intercourse of a woman, of a queen, bound her. The ruins of Palmyra conjured up too faithfully the name of Zenobia ! . . .

The pacha's two bankers, Malem Yusef and Malem Rafael, to whom she broached this subject, dissuaded her earnestly from it. The journey was excessively dangerous, and the Bedouins would not fail to make her prisoner and exact a very large ransom unless the pacha furnished her with troops. Then a certain Hanah Faknah, who had acted as guide to M. Fiott, offered to conduct her safe and sound to Palmyra. Lady Hester learned soon that he was offering to do much. What was to be done ? It was impossible for her to cross the desert under a disguise, for her intentions had been divulged and her slightest movements were noted with extreme attention. She resolved to demand a formidable escort from the pacha. Sayd Soliman then made her understand, in confidence, that the Emir Mahannah, chief of the Bedouins, was in revolt against the Porte, and that the inhabitants of Palmyra were beyond the reach of Turkish justice. New indecision, new uncertainties ! Meanwhile, the pacha had a crow to pluck with the cavalry : the famous Delibash, commanded by a young

bey, an acquaintance of Lady Hester and son of the deposed governor. Mutiny broke out at Damascus. In the deserts, terrible news, come from Mecca, was whispered : 50,000 Wahabis were threatening the town. The Bedouins had gathered and were ready to rush to their aid. Lady Hester, isolated in her Mohammedan quarter, caught up in the whirlpool of popular anxieties, was not at all uneasy. She thought only of demanding an asylum from her friend the Emir Bechir, the prince of the Mountain, who placed his troops at her disposal. She was flattered by his reception. If, as governor, he had had diabolical inspirations, she proclaimed him, nevertheless, an agreeable and amiable man. How she was to change her opinion hereafter !

The pacha, uneasy at the turn which events were taking, had caused old Muly Ishmael, the grand chief of the Delibash and of the Syrian troops, to be warned. Feared by the pachas, who would never have dared to make a hair of his head fall, he was adored by the Arabs, with whom he had taken refuge on several occasions, at the time when his life was threatened. Scarcely arrived at Damascus, Muly Ishmael demanded a visit from Lady Hester, " for I shall be very jealous of my young chief if he does not come," said he. It was as much an order as a request. Bravely she went there, although somewhat troubled by the terrible rumours

which were in circulation in regard to him. She was obliged to cross courts swarming with horses and horsemen, to stride over or avoid hundreds of soldiers sprawling on the ground, to argue and parley with fifty officers, before reaching the old chief, who was talking with the bey, her friend. Muly Ishmael was charming, offering her his house at Hama and an escort of Delibash. Lady Hester, very proud of this conquest, called him the Sir David Dundas of Syria. She remained an hour and was delighted by his courtesy, marked by a cordiality, a grace of manner, rather rare amongst the Turks.

Then the Wahabis vanished in smoke. And, one fine morning, Mahannah-el-Fadel, chief of the tribe of the Anezes, arrived at Damascus to demand back 4000 horses and flocks of sheep which the pacha had requisitioned from him. He asserted that the name of the Meleki (queen) was in the mouth of all the Bedouins of the desert.

During this time, Bruce, who was returning from Aleppo with Mr. Barker, English consul at that town, learned of these fine projects, and, terrified, hurried on, without stopping, to prevent—if there were still time—so great a folly. And the messengers ran along the roads carrying letters full of adjurations and entreaties.

Lady Hester lost her patience at meeting with resistance. “No caravan travels along the route by which I wish to go,” declared she,

incensed. "And if there were one, nothing would be able to persuade me to join it. They get into a ridiculous fright and arrive with a machine with bars, a *tartavane*, which Mr. Barker declares indispensable. All the consuls in the universe will not force me to go within it. What an absurd idea! In the event of attack, the drivers take themselves off, and one is left to the mercy of two obstinate mules. The speedy horse to whom the Arabs entrust themselves, that is something like; that is better; that is what I require! . . ."

The idea of putting Lady Hester in a cage was certainly not ordinary. Happily, Bruce fell ill, and the doctor was despatched to attend and calm him. The road skirted the desert, and, costumed as a Bedouin, with lance on shoulder, Meryon, by way of Yebroud, Kara, Hasia and Homs, reached Hama, where Bruce, already restored to health, soon rejoined him. He brought back with him a young Frenchman of Aleppo, called Beaudin, who spoke Arabic almost as well as a native of the country.

Leaving them to continue their journey, the doctor again took the road from Dasmascus to Yebroud. Then he made a detour to reach the village of Nebk, where a man was living whose acquaintance Lady Hester keenly desired to make. His name was Lascaris, and his history singular.

Of the Piedmontese family of the Lascaris, of Ventimiglia, he regarded himself as descendant of the Emperor of Trebizond. Without tracing his ancestry back so far, he had an uncle Grand Master of the Knights of Malta, and was himself a chevalier.

Bonaparte having seized the island on his way, Lascaris followed. Receiver of taxes—excellent place in the East—he met at Cairo a young Georgian slave of great beauty. Abducted at the age of fifteen, she had fallen into the harem of Murad Bey. Lascaris married her, for he was a fervent apostle of universal brotherhood—it is probable that, if she had been ugly, he would not have pushed so far and with so much enthusiasm the application of his principles! On the evacuation of Egypt, he brought his wife to Paris; but her manners and her education were too much out of tune in the brilliant society of that time. After some successes with shawls, some exhibitions of Turkish robes, the Parisian women turned their backs upon her to run to other spectacles more novel. Madame Lascaris begged her husband to return to the East. He did not require pressing, for he himself was deceived in his legitimate ambitions. He solicited through his aunt, Joséphine's mistress of the robes, an exalted post. He was offered a place as sub-prefect! Deeply wounded, they returned to Constantinople. There an idea of

genius occurred to Lascaris; he proposed to go to Georgia to establish there a new system of agriculture. An Armenian, who was on the look out for victims with money, offered himself as treasurer. The trio crossed the Black Sea, landed in the Crimea and were arrested for espionage. The Armenian made off, naturally, with the cash-box, while Lascaris and his wife were sent to St. Petersburg. Their innocence at last recognised, they found themselves with a very low purse. Then, having gradually lost all that remained—for the chevalier had many odd ideas difficult to realise—he endeavoured to furnish the peasants of the environs of Lattakia with European ploughs, the employment of which would double their harvest. The peasants grew angry, and their unappreciated benefactor was obliged to take himself off promptly. He became professor of music at Aleppo.

On November 3, 1812, the doctor arrived at Nebk and cast about for Lascaris's house. Perceiving a little girl of twelve who was sauntering around him, he questioned her. She was the servant of those whom he was looking for, and was called Katinko, or Catherine. But her astonishing resemblance to Lascaris induced the doctor to think that she was rather his daughter. The chevalier appeared on his doorstep, dirty and wretched-looking, wearing an abaye of striped wool, wound round his body after the

manner of the garments of Robin Hood, blue breeches in rather a melancholy condition, stockings and the red shoes worn by the peasants. His beard was long and thick. His wife retained little trace of beauty, which had disappeared, alas ! not to return ; the adorable Georgian girl had changed into the stout matron with masculine ways. They had arrived from Aleppo with bales of red cotton, which they hoped to exchange for money with the villagers of the neighbourhood. The doctor greatly enjoyed the conversation of Lascaris, whom his numerous travels had made a very well-informed and cultured man. He noted in him, however, a certain self-conceit, a certain sentiment of superiority which had no doubt been the sole cause of his disappointments. He appeared very embittered against Napoleon.

Two days afterwards, an urgent message recalled the doctor to Damascus, where Barker had just fallen seriously ill.

CHAPTER VII

LADY HESTER AND LASCARIS

WHEN the doctor arrived at Damascus, he found everything topsy-turvy. The commotion was extreme. The pacha's troops, already fully equipped, had been sent away, the guides dismissed, the caravan dispersed. Lady Hester announced publicly that she was postponing the journey, and, giving as pretexts Barker's illness, Bruce's weakness, and the advantage of the doctor's presence, decided to take only the road to Hama. She was not to arrive there directly.

Unforeseen events had, in fact, occurred during the doctor's absence. Lady Hester, who had secretly written to Mahannah-el-Fadel, emir of the Anezes, received a visit from his son Nasr. Supple, slight, of insinuating and agreeable manners, the young sheik, his legs and feet bare, wrapped himself with dignity in an old sheepskin and in a ragged robe. But the orange and green keffiyeh shaded a haughty countenance with a sharp profile. The people of his suite were less elegant. Pierre—decidedly much more the cook than the prophet—composed a monster lunch in

which Turkish and Arabic dishes alternated abundantly. The plum puddings particularly aroused the hilarity of the Bedouins, but they could not make up their minds to taste them.

Lady Hester, astonished by the state of Nasr's wardrobe, presented him with a complete costume, of which he scattered immediately the articles about him, throwing down mantles and abayes with a magnificent ease, as though they had been refuse.

The sheik made his hostess clearly understand that, if she persisted in going to Palmyra under the protection of the troops, he would consider her as an enemy, and that she would learn, at her risks and perils, who was sultan of the desert. So much the more that all the Bedouins, from the greatest to the smallest, had their imagination excited and their covetousness attracted by the arrival of the English princess, riding, with spurs of gold, a mare worth forty purses, bringing a book to discover hidden treasures (the engravings of Wood and Dawkins!), and a little packet of herbs to transform stones into precious metals! . . . Nasr, with much astuteness, added that a person so distinguished ought to trust herself to the honour of the Bedouins, for the Turkish soldiers, ignorant of the tracks, the spots where water was to be found, the places infested by rebels, would throw her into a thousand difficulties, and would be the first to

march off when danger threatened with a touching unanimity.

The result of the visit of this adroit diplomatist was that Lady Hester, without the knowledge of anyone, arranged an interview with the Emir Mahannah-el-Fadel. She arrived at Nebk like a whirlwind, carried off Lascaris and his wife, on her way, to serve as interpreters, and at the hamlet of Tell Bise, beyond Homs, she plunged suddenly into the desert. Mahannah had sent her a Bedouin as guide. Alone, she advanced across the boundless plains of sands, entrusting herself, with a rashness without example, to the hordes of marauders whose profession is to despoil unsuspecting travellers.

At last, the camp appeared, and she went straight to the chief's tent. Mahannah was fifty or sixty years old ; his piercing eye compensated for a difficulty in hearing, his beard was bushy and also his eyebrows. Dirt and filth begrimed in an extraordinary way his face, stranger to the use of water. He wore a jacket of Damascus satin which had once been red, of which some ransomed merchants had been despoiled.

Lady Hester did not waste time in useless salaams :

“ I know that thou art a robber,” said she to him, “ and I am now in thy power. I have left behind me all those who were protecting me, my soldiers, my friends, to show thee that it is thee

and thy tribe whom I have chosen as my defenders.”

Fascinated, Mahannah treated her with the greatest respect. For three days Lady Hester travelled with the camp.

What unforgettable recollections were those evening halts around the dull fires! The encampment and its vicinity were swarming with living things. Camels with velvet steps returning from the springs with their moist leathern bottles; children romping with the foals; women tatooed with fantastical flowers going to milk the she-camels or park the kids. The air resounded with the call of the shepherds and the bleating of the sheep, which were returning in disorder. In the shadow you heard the flocks breathing. The horses, which were shackled near the tents, pawed the sand impatiently, and the desert stretched out its limbs with gladness at the approach of night. The Bedouins, all attention, closely encircled the old poets come from the banks of the Euphrates, who chanted the splendour of dead heroes, and the cry of the roving hyenas made the narrow tents appear better.

Mahannah escorted Lady Hester to within a few miles of Hama, and Nasr himself conducted her so far as the house which had been prepared for her. In the middle of December, the rest of the expedition rejoined Lady Hester. The doctor lodged with the Lascaris, and had then all the

time and the leisure to observe and know this mysterious personage.

Lamartine, in his introduction to the *Récit du séjour de Fatella Sayeghir chez les Arabes du grand désert*, has traced an astonishing portrait of this Lascaris who, from the end of the Directory, foresaw that Asia alone offered a suitable field for the regenerating ambition of the hero. "It appears that the young warrior of Italy, whose imagination was as luminous as the East, vague as the desert, great as the world, had on this subject confidential conversations with M. de Lascaris, and darted a flash of his mind towards that horizon which was opening to him his destiny. It was only a flash, and I am grieved by it; it is evident that Bonaparte was the man of the East, and not the man of Europe. . . . In Asia, he would have stirred men by millions, and, a man of simple ideas himself, he would have with two or three ideas erected a monumental civilisation which would have endured a thousand years after him. But the error was committed: Napoleon chose Europe; only he wished to throw an explorer behind him to discover what there would be to do there and to mark out the route to the Indies, if his fortune were to open it to him. M. de Lascaris was this man. Man of genius, of talent and of sagacity, he feigned a sort of monomania to form an excuse for his stay in Syria and his persistent relations

with all the Arabs of the desert who arrived at Aleppo."

This judgment is curious, if it is not entirely just, for Lamartine treats with the last contempt the internal work of Napoleon—magnificent administration drawn from the chaos of the Revolution, and which France maintains still—which he calls an "unskilful restoration." As for the Eastern Question, it seems, on the contrary, that the Emperor had had intercourse with it. If he had been the man of Europe, he would have engaged in a merciless hand-to-hand struggle with England; if he had devoted to his Navy a quarter of the attention which he gave to his Army, he would have struck his rival a mortal blow. In place of that, he parries the blows, he forestalls them, he attacks himself, but the mind is elsewhere, farther away, turned no doubt towards the Levant. The Egyptian expedition, despatch of Sebastiani to Constantinople, mission of General Gardane to Teheran, and, above all, efforts constant, perpetual, obstinate to preserve the integrity of the Turkish Empire and bridle the Russian appetite, the Moscow campaign to subdue the Czar, the only troublesome competitor at Constantinople, are they not the tangible proofs of the Eastern desire which the creative and robust imagination of Napoleon did not conceive as a mirage? Did he intend to remake the Roman Empire with its frontiers

dispersed over three worlds and perhaps the empire of Alexander with undefined limits. The fall of the eagles has carried away his secret. But at present we are in 1812, on the eve of the Russian expedition. Napoleon has made M. de Nerciat, former attaché to the Gardene mission, and Colonel Boutin start for St. Jean d'Acre and Egypt in order to sound the ground and to prepare the new ways which the victories—he did not imagine the possibility of a defeat—were going to open. Lascaris precedes them then seven or eight years on the desert routes. For what purpose? To prepare the invasion of the Indies? Lamartine affirms it formally and gives Lascaris qualifications and a position of the first importance.

What is certain, is that, if Lascaris were the secret agent of Napoleon, he was a remarkable actor and played his part in so masterly a manner that not only the doctor—after all, but little of a physiognomist—but Lady Hester, who was more difficult to deceive, allowed themselves to be duped completely by it.

It will be amusing to know Lady Hester's opinion on this subject, if only in order to follow the evolution of a woman's judgment.

On returning from her journey to the Emir Mahannah, Lascaris is lauded to the skies. She writes at that time to General Oakes, Governor of Malta :

“ I have met here an extraordinary character, Mr. Lascaris, of Ventimiglia. He is a little giddy, but he is a remarkable man who has an astonishing knowledge of the Arabs. He is extremely poor and very energetic. If he falls into the hands of the French, we shall stand some chance of repenting of it in the future. *At present he is altogether English*, and it would be worth the trouble of maintaining him in his excellent inclinations. The chancellery of the Order of Malta and the advocate Torrigiani have all the papers relating to his family and to his *humble demands*: little pension which would assure him a piece of bread; he asks nothing more ! ”

And General Oakes is solicited to intervene, to represent to the Government all the advantage which there will be in keeping a faithful subject at the gates of the desert where the turbulent Arabs were beginning to shake off the yoke of the pachas.

“ Besides,” added she, “ it would be a great act of humanity towards *a great man*. The French plough the desert with emissaries and envoys. Why should we not do the same thing . . . ? ”

Napoleon’s agent kept by the English Government ! The story is delicious. What was the value of Lascaris in politics ? but in the matter of duplicity he is truly unique. He feigns

poverty, for one cannot well imagine a secret mission without substantial subsidies to support it, finds the means to interest Lady Hester in his case and to exhibit himself in a day to such advantage that she dreams of employing him in the interests of her own country.

But great enthusiasms have the brightness and the duration of fires of straw. Some weeks later, Lady Hester begins to think that Lascaris is a hare-brained fellow. If General Oakes is able to obtain some money for him, it will be a charity, for the unfortunate man is on thorns (the old fox continues the little comedy), but he must not be reckoned on ; he is mad and will not be good for anything. . . . The cream of praises is beginning to turn. Finally, Lady Hester, saturated with the stories and jeremiads of Lascaris, gave him a handsome present to compensate him for his journey and invited him to remain with her. His part of interpreter stopped there, and having squeezed the lemon, she threw away the skin. It is an action in which women and statesmen excel. She was not to know the true figure of Lascaris until very much later, when Lamartine's book would have reached the East. What a miscalculation for her who pretended to discover the habits and character of people at first sight ! To have been duped, she whom her divining instinct had never deceived ! " It was not to Napoleon that he was so much attached,"

will she then say pensively in recalling the "humble demands"; "it was to him who held the pocket-book." And then, in a lapidary formula, she will endeavour to recover her prestige in the eyes of the sceptical doctor: "Lascaris had the heart of a Roman and the skill in intrigue of a Greek." But there are things which one invents afterwards, like those ambassadors who, in their Memoirs, attribute to themselves the merit of having foreseen the past.

Mahannah-el-Fadel had sent a Bedouin on an embassy to Hama. He demanded a visit from the "Queen's" doctor. Lady Hester hastened to consent, calculating that she would thus gain the emir's friendship and would permit the doctor to discover the route, to hire a lodging at Palmyra, to prepare the expedition—in a word.

The doctor knew that Lascaris was unwell, embittered, of a melancholy disposition. One night, summoned in haste by Madame Lascaris, he had been witness of a violent attack of epilepsy. Accordingly, in order to afford him some distraction, he offered to take him with him on the journey which he was going to make to the heart of the desert. Lascaris accepted and even confided to the doctor that for a long time past he had desired to visit Palmyra, and "had never been able to realise his project." He rejoiced therefore at this good fortune and proposed to abandon the world to plant cabbages in the ruins.

The little caravan, Meryon, Lascaris, the guide Hassan, all three wearing the Bedouin costume : white koumbaz, flowing trousers, clumsy red shoes, skin pelisses, orange and jade keffiye, left Hama on January 2, 1813. It is a date to retain in mind.

The tribes Beni Khaled and Hadydy, encountered by chance on the way, offered them the coffee of hospitality and a place under the open tents. Mahannah was on the point of striking his camp when they joined him, and they marched with him several days. On January 7, the encampment was established near Karyatein, and the snow slowly began to fall. The doctor would have liked to start for Palmyra, as the weather was becoming alarming, and the Bedouins were moving towards the South. But the old chief, stuffed with remedies, meant to be cured entirely. Nasr, speculating on some backsheesh, amused himself by terrorising him. At length, sensible that they might incur the resentment of Lady Hester, the Bedouins consented to their departure. The doctor spent a week at Palmyra, hired three huts in the north-east corner of the Temple of the Sun, and, on his return, was astounded to encounter in the Djebel Abyad, as frequented as Bond Street ! some miles from the town, Giorgio, whom Lady Hester in alarm had despatched to look for him, with two guides. Bewildered and shivering with

cold, the unfortunate men nearly succumbed to the tempest of snow which was raging over these desolate expanses. On January 26, they joyfully perceived the emir's tents.

Madame Lascaris, Fatalla Sazeghir, a young Christian of Aleppo, serving as dragoman, cicerone, spokesman, and young Catherine, or Katinko, followed them for some hours. Lascaris had conceived a grandiose project: that of transforming these desert wastes into vast khans crammed with merchandise. He had had his wife and his stores sent for immediately, but the cupidity never satisfied and incessantly reviving of his aggressive customers was to prove an insurmountable obstacle to his ingenious ideas. To gain the favours of Mahannah, Madame Lascaris had brought a complete costume, worth a great deal of money, in which in a moment the old man was dressed anew from head to foot. But all his sons, Nasr at their head, arrived, their appetites sharpened, to demand their share. It is better to give willingly what people are able to take by force! But it was clear that Lascaris's stock was to go there in its entirety. In proportion as they were enriched too quickly, they did not know how to keep their presents. Mahannah, being close to the fires, was warm, and threw his pelisse to a friend. A moment later, feeling the cold, he seized in the most natural way in the world a garment which was

drying. The owners were obliged to watch their property!

Is not the hospitality accorded to strangers still the best source of the Bedouins' revenues? Hardly has the traveller passed a night in the tent of the sheik than the latter admires the beauty of his shawl. If he opens his trunks, a thousand prying eyes discover that he has spare linen and a store of tobacco. Does he leave his boots at the door, the host finds them better than his own, and, so thinking, slips them on. In short, after a week of this order of things, the traveller is more naked than a worm and less rich than Job!

On January 28, the doctor regained Hama, happy to be able at last to wash his hands and change his linen, which had not happened to him for four weeks. Giorgio had remained to accompany Lascaris to Palmyra, but their visit was very short.

Here there is a curious comparison to make between Dr. Meryon's journal and the recital of *Fatalla Sazeghir*, published by Lamartine. This *Fatalla* had a little collection of notes, which Lamartine bought, had translated, and himself put into French. This extraordinary mission of Lascaris is the leading thread which runs through these incongruous and astonishing adventures, like a needle through the complicated web of a piece of Byzantine embroidery.

And here is the substance :

Fatalla and Lascaris, under the name of Sheik Ibrahim (decidedly Europeans have a weakness for this pseudonym), set out for Homs in February 1810, ostensibly to sell their red cotton and their glass-ware, in reality to prepare ways for Napoleon when his armies, on the march for the Indies, should cross the desert. A Bedouin of the name of Hassan conducted them to Palmyra, where they made the acquaintance of Mahannah and Nasr. They remained some time with this tribe, returned to Palmyra, passed the winter at Damascus at the house of M. Chabassau (evidently the eternal Dr. Chaboceau), and in the spring of 1811 tried their chance with the Drayhy—the celebrated destroyer of the Turks—and gained his friendship. There remained the Wahabis, who would certainly oppose the success of the French project. Lascaris drew up against them a treaty of alliance with all the Bedouins of the desert. He scoured the country so far as beyond the Tigris ; Fatalla lent his eloquence to the cause, and the treaty was covered with signatures. More than 500,000 Bedouins allied themselves thus to them. In the spring of 1813, a battle which lasted more than forty days was fought at the gates of Hama, between 150,000 Wahabis and 80,000 Bedouins and Turks. The Wahabis were defeated. Then Fatalla accompanied the Drayhy to the terrible

Ebu-Sihoud, King of the Wahabis, and contributed to reconcile the two. Lascaris, his mission accomplished, started for Constantinople, where he arrived in April, 1814, just to hear of Napoleon's defeats and the fruitlessness of his efforts. Grievously stricken by this unexpected blow, he reached Cairo under an English passport, and died in misery. Mr. Salt, the English consul, plundered his clothes and his manuscripts.

Lascaris would, then, have performed the greater part of his circuits among the nomads before the arrival of the doctor. Well, during the journey which they accomplished together, the first asserted that he had never seen Palmyra, at a time when, according to Fatalla, he had been there twice in the course of the year 1810. Affair of tactics perhaps to baffle a rival.

But what is of more importance, is that neither Mahannah-el-Fadel nor the principal chiefs encountered recognised the famous Sheik Ibrahim. Ought we, then, to imagine a prodigious watch-word given by Lascaris to the entire desert? It is impossible.

Elsewhere improbabilities embellish agreeably the histories of Fatalla. Nasr, he recounts, was killed in 1811 in the wars between the Drayhy and Mahannah. Zaher, son of the Drayhy, brought him down with a lance-thrust, then "cut his body in pieces, placed it in a basket and sent it to Mahannah's camp by a prisoner

whose nose he had cut off." Well, a year later, this unfortunate young man, in wonderfully good health, paid a visit to Lady Hester, then at Damascus, to dissuade her from going to Palmyra. Lascaris had a short memory ; he had already forgotten the encampment near Karyatein in January, 1813, from which he accompanied Nasr to search for provisions in the village. Both returned, besides, with an empty bag.

It is Nasr again who, in the spring of 1813, escorted Lady Hester to Palmyra and behaved himself in a horrible and brutal manner. Two years later, Mahannah wrote to "the Queen," who was settled at Mar-Elias, to beg her to intervene with the Pacha of Damascus in favour of Nasr, who had wrought great havoc in the full granaries of the Governor of Hama. This dead man clung to life tenaciously ! As for the relations of Lascaris with Lady Hester, they are very whimsical and demand some rectifications.

Fatalla pretends that it is in the spring of 1812 that he learned of the arrival of a princess, daughter of the King of England, in Syria, where she was displaying a royal luxury. She had overwhelmed with magnificent presents Mahannah-el-Fadel and had made him escort her to Palmyra, where she had distributed her bounty with profusion and had acquired a formidable party amongst the Bedouins, who had proclaimed her queen. Lascaris felt very much alarmed at

this news, believing that he saw in it an intrigue to ruin his plans.

At this period, Lady Hester had scarcely disembarked from Egypt and was on the way to Jerusalem. The Palmyra project, if it existed already, was still informal and secret.

But Fatalla does not confine himself to one error. According to his version, Lascaris received an invitation from Lady Hester to go to her at Hama, as well as his wife, who had remained at St. Jean d'Acre. This invitation annoyed him the more, inasmuch as for three years he had avoided giving her news, leaving her in ignorance of the place of his residence and of his intimacy with the Bedouins. He conveyed to his wife, by special courier, the order to refuse. It was too late; Madame Lascaris, alarmed about this phantom husband, had already accepted. This model household was reunited then under the benevolent auspices of Lady Hester, who, after having essayed in vain by adroit questions to obtain from him some explanation in regard to his relations with the Bedouins, assumed at the end a tone of authority which afforded Lascaris a pretext for a rupture. He sent his wife back to Acre and left Lady Hester, having fallen out completely with her.

It is not after Lady Hester's expedition to Palmyra, but before, that Lascaris places the episode. The proofs accumulate to annul

Fatalla's evidence. On November 3, 1812, the doctor visited Lascaris and his martial spouse. In her expedition to Mahannah-el-Fadel, Lady Hester took both husband and wife. And her invitation to Hama cannot reunite the Lascaris, since they were not separated. Then, in January, 1813, there is the arrival in Mahannah's camp of Madame Lascaris, of the famous Fatalla and of the bales of merchandise. As for the tone of authority which Hester assumes in endeavouring to thwart the secret mission which Lascaris had received from Napoleon, the doctor, who wrote his journal methodically every day, shows the improbability of it. And his lack of imagination, that ingenuousness which causes him to record all the incidents of the journey without understanding them, is the surest guarantee of his veracity.

And the Wahabis? And this battle of 1813 at the gates of Hama, in which, according to Fatalla, 150,000 Wahabis and 80,000 Bedouins and Turks were engaged?

Lady Hester did not budge from Hama from December 15 to March 20. In April, she committed tranquilly her little extravagance at Palmyra. Of Wahabis, not a shadow! Of battle, no traces! All the same, 230,000 men do not shuffle out of it like that! And on March 7, the inhabitants of Syria celebrated by great rejoicings the recapture of Mecca from the Wahabis.

If Lascaris had not performed his distant peregrinations before January, 1813—and the comparison between the memoranda of journeys kept by Meryon and Fatalla seem certainly to indicate it—he did not have the necessary time to undertake them afterwards. He is gripped as in a vice between that date and that of his arrival at Constantinople, coinciding with the defeats of the campaign of France. And before ? Before 1810 ? Lascaris was able to travel across the entire world, but Fatalla did not know it and was unable to write his journal.

The young dragoman's recital ought to be pardoned some degree of inaccuracy. It is necessary to subtract the Oriental zero. Five hundred thousand Bedouins are, after all, only five or six thousand. The Tigris and the Euphrates are two rivers very near to each other, and the name of the first looks so well in a history, even when it is a question of the second. A skirmish of some hundreds of men produces much less effect than a pitched battle of 200,000 warriors. There are, besides, passages which are of a striking interest : pictures painted with a large brush of the turmoil of camps, of songs of love and battle, of tribes on the march, of puffs of burning air which bring all the nostalgia, all the violence, of the free life of the desert, and in which the imprint of Lamartine is recognisable.

The whole art of the narrator is to interest, and it must be confessed that Fatalla practised this art wonderfully well. Lascaris's sojourn amongst the wandering Arabs is perhaps, after all, only the journey made with Dr. Aferson to the Emir Mahannah-el-Fadel, and transposed by a secretary with a rich and fertile imagination. It is necessary to remark the similarity of the name of the Bedouin Hassan who, according to the two versions, served them as guide. A Levantine historiographer translated by a poet ! The enterprise was truly hazardous. Have successive interpretations altered the original text, or has Lamartine been mystified by a clever story-teller who had already modified the rigid framework of time and facts, which, like a good Oriental, he rendered elastic according to the inclination of his subject. We shall never know, for Lascaris's papers, which alone would have been able to throw light on his real mission and his real travels, have disappeared, snapped up by the English Government.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUEEN OF PALMYRA

LADY HESTER was cooped up in Hama. Amongst the old men, the most grey-headed did not recollect so severe a winter as that of 1813. Nearly all the fruit-trees of the beautiful gardens which caress the Orontes perished frozen. A tribe of Arabs which was encamped in the plain was engulfed by a snow-storm, with the women, the children and the flocks. Alone the rustic noirias continued to hum, and in the wind, the squall and the rain their songs rose infinitely monotonous and melancholy, embodying the revolt of the earth made for sun and joy. But the travellers did not wait longer than in the first days of spring the swarms of bees to take flight from the great dead orchards.

M. de Nerciat, passing by Hama, offered Lady Hester a salutary diversion. Then Beaudin fell from his horse and spoiled his face. Mrs. Fry had an acute attack of pleurisy. The health of Lady Stanhope herself was not brilliant; but she was one of those women who endure better the fatigues of journeys than the monotony of prolonged sojourns in the same place, and the

doctor, who knew the fierce energy of his patient, did not venture to oppose the expedition.

On February 17, the Emir Mahannah arrived at Hama. Muly Ishmael, full of amiability for Lady Hester, had warned her to mistrust the Bedouin cupidity. The discussions took place in his presence. It was arranged that the emir, as the price of his escort, should be paid 3000 piastres, of which 1000 were to be given him at once, and the rest on the return from Palmyra. Excellent precaution to avoid the accidents of the journey !

On that 20th of March, Hama was in a ferment of excitement. For some hours the town was buzzing like a hive, and the eternal noirias supported in chorus the increasing noises. Women almost unveiled, squalling children, grave men, hurried excitedly to the gates. Jews, caught between their curiosity and their cupidity, took the risk of an incursion into the street to regain their shops at full gallop. Patrols of Dellatis—their tall hats pointing towards the sky—rode about, jostling the famished and howling dogs. It was to-day that the Syt, the English princess, was going into the desert with her escort. So far as a league from the town, the route was many-coloured with spectators. Children posted as an advance-guard arrived at the end of the train clamouring the news : “ There she is ! There she is ! ”

Lady Hester, her long burnous floating in the wind, mounted on a horse with a flowing mane, passed, surrounded by her general staff of sheiks. Their lances decorated with ostrich feathers, their curly hair meandering down their cheeks, their bony mares, their savage demeanour, made a bad impression on the crowd. A long murmur of pity and commiseration rose towards the Syt. The janissaries who were keeping it back were overwhelmed; all the inhabitants of Hama wishing to take a last look at her who was going to her death, to be plundered at the least.

Sixty-six Bedouins galloped on the flanks of the caravan, their keffiyes and abayes floating in the breeze. Mrs. Fry, always so ill at ease in her masculine garb, Bruce and the doctor, who had allowed their beards to grow to keep themselves in countenance, Beaudin, Pierre, the syces, the men-servants followed in good order. A file of twenty-five horsemen. And to wind up the procession, some forty camels, with the haughty and disillusioned airs of old politicians undeceived about many things, defiled solemnly, showing their varied burdens: tents, light and heavy baggage, firewood, sacks of rice and flour, tobacco, coffee, sugar, soap, kitchen utensils, leathern bottles of drinking water, oats for the horses.

Lady Hester undertook the journey as a true Englishwoman whose formula is simple and in

good taste : to have the maximum of comfort and the minimum of boredom. Little does it matter after mobilising a province, after unsettling a part of the earth, to render oneself odious to the inhabitants. It is always necessary to set one's house in order to travel with the English.

After a march of two days, the caravan arrived at the springs of Keffiyah, where the Emir Mahannah was encamped with his tribe. Lady Hester lingered there two days. The doctor dreamer, was he not seeking to see again the Bedouin girl who had touched his vulnerable heart ? He called to mind the last stage of his journey with the Anezes.

“ Ah, Raby, little Bedouin girl, where art thou now ? Where is thy graceful and full figure, thy gilded skin, thy sad gazelle-like eyes ? How lightly didst thou spring on to the back of a camel, placing thy bare foot on his protuberant joints, seizing with grace his tail by way of a hand-rail !

“ Raby, thou didst turn thy head too often towards the stranger ; perhaps thou wast saying to thyself in thy artlessly coquettish mind : Why dost thou look at me thus, amiable cavalier ? I know that I am beautiful, for, although I am only fourteen years of age, several chiefs of the tribe have already demanded me in marriage. But my father demands fifty camels and a

thoroughbred mare, and he says that that will not be enough as the price of my charms. . . .

“ Raby, little Raby, what hast thou done that a single smile from thee should be graven in my soul for ever ? ”

And the doctor becomes exalted in sentimental and lyrical incantations which time carried away like mustard seed.

The Anezes, of whom Mahannah was the chief, were at that time warring against the rival tribe of the Feydars. It was reported that strong detachments of the enemy had been met with on the desert routes. It was necessary to be on the watch to guard against a surprise attack.

The order of march was strictly established. At the head were Nasr, Lady Hester and her escort ; Bruce, the doctor and the armed servants protected the rearguard, and the scouts extended themselves unceasingly across the sand-hills. The travellers felt then that the journey was serious and disquieting. They were on territory which did not submit to the Turks, and had no succour to expect. Their protectors were Bedouins, conquered by the lure of gain to-day, but changeable, uncertain, unattachable, hostile to-morrow. The caravan was long, the camels loaded with objects calculated to excite covetousness, the servants little numerous. The courage and the decision of a woman, her sang-froid, her energy, her liberalities, the renown which had

preceded her, it was this which constituted the surest guarantees for the success of the expedition ! And this woman was ill, so much that Bruce and Meryon asked each other, not without trembling, how she would withstand the fatigue. How was physical exhaustion and mental lassitude to keep in good order the quarrelsome and thievish Bedouins ? Already there was a struggle, cunning and dissimulated, between Nasr and Lady Hester : the one wishing to compel the other to increase the price agreed upon, ready to employ every means to gain piastres ; the other persuaded that, if she yielded, to-morrow her baggage, her arms, her clothes would no longer belong to her.

The start took place at daybreak, in the sharp morning air, and they marched under a uniform sky, of an implacable and dull blue. The tawny sands muffled the shoes of the horses, and in the great solitude, the glistening void of the desert, the smallest objects, a tuft of prickly grass, a fox, the flight of a partridge, assumed an extraordinary importance. On a sudden, the alarm disturbed the caravan. An attack was imminent. From the extremity of the horizon a troop of horsemen was rushing towards them at full gallop. Wild excitement ! Rumours ! Lady Hester, however, examined with her eye the extreme line of the desert, and immediately assured her companions that there were many

horses in the distance, but that they were without riders. This assertion, subsequently verified, sensibly increased her prestige with the Bedouins, whose piercing eyes were accustomed, like those of sailors, to watch without intermission for the dangers of their seas of sand.

There were many distractions to relieve the monotony of the journey; there were little organised robberies. If the servants, clothed anew from head to foot, had the misfortune to feel warm and to take off their cloaks or draw out their handkerchiefs, the agile Nasr supervised and claimed his due. There were also mimic combats. All in a body, standing erect on their high stirrups, they raised a shout, savage, swift, strident, which the horses obeyed in starting off at full gallop. The mirrors with which the saddles were decorated flashed in the sunlight. The Bedouins brandished their lances. The horses increased their speed to join the mares. The horsemen approached yelling at the full strength of their lungs their war cries; their bodies were almost touching; and at the moment when the inevitable shock was causing the spectators to gasp with fear, a turning movement executed with excessive rapidity checked the career of their excited mounts. The love of fighting made some of them forget the game, and the blows became real; blood flowed in thin furrows, while the heaving flanks of the

cruelly abused horses were covered with sweat and their mouths filled with red foam.

Then the caravan encountered the tribe of the Sebah, which was descending the slopes of Mount Belaz, which was simply a hill of sand. It was a magnificent and unknown spectacle. Not a fold of the ground which was not covered with moving specks. It seemed that a page of ancient history had come to meet the travellers. The desert on the march! In the first years of the Hegira the nomads marched thus with slow and weary steps towards uncertain goals. How had it changed, in fact? The strong camels were still adorned with the *haudag*—compromise between the palanquin and the basket—from which emerged the heads of women and children, and the weaker camels carried the carpets rolled into a ball, which appeared at a distance enormous nests. The men, mounted on their mares, surrounded by wild colts, shook their keffiyes of vibrating colours; the women, the ring in the nose, well-tattooed lips, wrapped in their red cotton cloth spotted with white, resumed instinctively the antique poses. And then there were the beautiful naked children. Nothing gives more the impression of eternity and immobility than the free life of the desert. And, carried back for several centuries, Lady Hester, Bruce and Meryon watched the tribe disappearing in the distance, until it became like a handful

of confetti dispersed over the sands and the call of the camel-drivers : “ Yalla ! Yalla ! ” died away.

And when the steppes became larger still with the blue shadows brought by the night, the caravan came to a halt. Sometimes alone near springs half-covered by sand, sometimes welcomed by an encampment of Beni Hez or Beni Omar. The Bedouins unfolded, as fancy dictated, their black tents of goats' hair, lighted by a thousand holes. The women hastened to prepare the evening meal, and baked gently over the embers the soft, flat loaves. A gigantic cauldron was filled with water, butter and rice—water collected most often in the holes and with which a kitchen-maid in England would have refused to wash her floor, so muddy was it, and butter which a prolonged sojourn in skin bottles had rendered as rancid and bitter as could possibly be desired. All that was boiled pell-mell, and the mud cheerfully incorporated with this mixture. The admirers watched the progress of the cooking and squatted on their left legs, raising their right knee to the height of the chin. They plunged their hands into the dish and drew from it a heap of food, which they threw into the air and dexterously pressed in order to cool it and to make the juice run out of it. And their thumbs adroitly guided the enormous shovelful to its destination. When they were

satisfied, they surrendered their places to others, and, after having plunged their greasy fingers into the sand, they passed them nonchalantly over their abayas. For they were dirty, thoroughly dirty; they employed their hands for nameless purposes—such as to wipe their feet when they were wet—while the neighbourhood of springs failed to stimulate them to elementary ablutions. Sometimes there was mutton, sometimes also treacle as dark as raisiné. And always coffee. The person who prepared it ground the berries in a little mortar; at this music the whole camp hurried up. Wiping the cups with an old rag—water is too precious to be wasted—he sent round the bitter and scorching liquid.

Lady Stanhope's companions rejoiced greatly at her foresight by which they profited after having complained about it.

“Nothing in the world has ever been so well organised,” she exclaimed, laughing, “which shows that I am a worthy pupil of Colonel Gordon, for I am at once quartermaster, adjutant and commissary-general. We are living as comfortably as if we were at home, and the Duke of Kent would not give more orders to the minute and would not watch more severely their execution. Really, it is the only way of accomplishing an enterprise of this kind with some pleasure.”

And the doctor, although pretending to have taken a fancy to camel's milk, was very pleased to have a closed tent and sugar in his coffee.

Lady Hester had found the best formula for travelling in the East: that which consists of living the life of the Arabs without sharing their tents infested with vermin, of becoming impregnated with the picturesqueness of their manners without mimicking them, of admiring the patriarchal simplicity of their repasts without partaking from the common pot. People who have never roved the world except from the depths of their arm-chairs, do not understand this reserve; it is so much less poetical! But the greatest travellers are those who watch their luggage with the greatest care. One can very well enjoy the pleasure of a Bedouin camp without being covered with fleas and without having one's stomach turned by meats more or less dirty and decomposed. Only few persons have the courage of their opinions.

Lady Hester had courage of all kinds. Thus, she really knew the Bedouins, not the Bedouins of exportation and of comic opera, but the dirty Bedouins, the Bedouins to the life, braggarts, plunderers, cheats, rancorous haters, as witness the one who having had his pipe filled with camel dung, by way of tobacco, by a Christian humorist, gave the village over to fire and sword, and exterminated all the caravans within

reach of his vengeance ! But so ready in praises, so apt in compliments, singularly discerning—do they not call her “the Queen ?”

From time to time, there was certainly a shadow. The Bedouins showed their true character in declaring that if the pacha’s troops had had the audacity to penetrate into the desert, they would have sent them—stark-naked and without beards—to their affairs. Was it not, after all, the fault of those who treated them as fools and related to them cock and bull stories at a time when they are most susceptible and more difficult to manage than all the nations of old Europe.

And then she had the good fortune to encounter a sheik. A marvellous sheik ! A sheik in whose presence Lord Petersham would die with envy. The sprightly air of a Frenchman with the manners and the ease of Lord Rivers or the Duke of Grafton.

She learned the Bedouin morals, the strange customs and the famous *Dukhyl*, the code of the rights and the prohibitions of hospitality. A Bedouin who had been robbed has no courts to which to appeal. What does he do ? He lies in wait for the robber and so soon as he catches sight of him, he throws at him a ball of thread which he has concealed in his hand. If the ball of thread in unwinding itself touches the robber, the victim has won his cause and recovers his

property. But if he misses his aim, he must fly as quickly as he can to save his life. The captive to regain his liberty has only to make secretly a knot in his master's keffiye, but, attention, *nefah* !

If the murderer succeeds in entering his victim's tent or in eating at the family table, he is sacred, but take care, *nefah* !

Thus, the robber is never sure of keeping his booty, the victor his prisoner, the son of the assassinated his vengeance. Their piercing sight is their only defence, and the fateful word is able alone to break the charm. All the Bedouins have more or less clean consciences, unceasingly on their guard, watching on the right, watching on the left, always distrustful, never in repose, they have too often not to fear to be duped in their turn. And the camp resounds with the word "*nefah*," which the children and women repeat in shrill tones.

By an admirable foresight, the Bedouins have understood the inanity of a justice often lame and one-eyed, and have remitted to chance the care of passing sentence. Only in this game of blindman's buff, which takes the place of social laws, they are the most adroit and the strongest who gain the end, the forfeits are bloody, and the feeble, those who run less swiftly, those who are captured, mark out the track, motionless for ever.

Lady Hester was accustomed, when the first disturbance which followed the installation of the camp had quieted down, to gather under her tent the sheiks with whom she desired to talk. She was highly amused at the terror which they had of Russia. They thanked Allah that she was not the Czarina, otherwise, said they, their liberty would have been lost.

But one evening, Nasr, urged on by one knows not what maggot in his brain, retorted sharply to the messenger :

“Lady Hester is perhaps the daughter of a vizier, but I am the son of a prince, and I am not disposed to go to her tent now. If she had need of me, let her come or send her interpreter.”

Lady Hester was obliged to swallow the insult in silence and to restrain the answer which rose to her lips. The Bedouins were in a hum of excitement, murmuring that Nasr was angry, that that did not augur anything good, that he was going to give the order to return. And, as had been foreseen, a very bad effect was produced on the servants, who pricked up their ears like hares surrounded by the hunters. But Lady Hester remained very calm and treated Nasr with the most complete indifference. This was not what he was expecting, and he postponed until the following night the end of his attempt at intimidation.

At dawn, the doctor started for Palmyra as a courier. While Lady Hester, shaken in her confidence in Nasr, was conferring with Bruce and Beaudin as to the measures to be taken, Pierre came running to announce that some mares had been carried off and that Rajdans were roaming round the camp. They heard neighing, cries, the sound of hoofs and galloping. The Bedouins were making ready for the fight.

Nasr, enveloping himself with mystery, rushed up to Lady Hester's tent, relating that he was going to be attacked on account of his alliance with her. "I shall perish rather than abandon thee," he declared, making visible efforts to animate himself to enthusiasm. Lady Hester, having judged the degree of his heroism, decided to leave him and to go alone into the desert. Refusing to listen to him, alarmed by this new folly, she sprang on her horse and started. Her mare was a good one and her dagger trustworthy. Suddenly, she caught sight of Bedouins armed to the teeth who were coming in her direction. Then, standing erect on her stirrups, and removing the yashmak which veiled her face transfigured by anger, she cried in a voice of command: "Stop! stop!" Pronounced in an unknown tongue, this order only produced the more effect, and the horsemen reined back their steeds, but to raise exclamations of joy and

admiration. It was only a ruse of Nasr to prove her courage. The Bedouin pleasantries are sometimes clumsy.

On the morrow, towards midday, at the time when the sun was dissolving the sands into orange-coloured gems, Lady Hester and her escort reached the last hills which guarded the mysterious town. And the desert was suddenly peopled with strange beings, gnomes or demons sprung up from the earth. All the male inhabitants of Palmyra had come to meet their visitor. Some fifty of them, on foot, clad in simple little short petticoats and ornamented with a thousand glass beads, which glared on their swarthy skin like gildings on the morocco of a tawny binding, joined to their deafening cries the noise of old cauldrons and saucepans which they beat with all their might. Others, more proud than d'Artagnan himself, mounted on their Arab mares, fired their matchlocks under the nose of Lady Hester, who happily did not dislike the smell of powder. They mimicked the attack and defence of a caravan, and the pedestrians gave proof of an incredible dexterity in the art of plundering the horsemen. Never had more experienced valets de chambre, in a shorter time, undressed their masters from head to foot.

Lady Hester quietened the excited band so soon as she caught sight of the square towers with

which the Valley of Tombs began, and demanded silence.

The ruins were there. . . . What joy and what pleasure there is in the discovery of dead cities ! These places which were the theatre of events which distance has rendered extraordinary belong to the traveller. He is able at his pleasure and for some hours to recover the colonnades which the sand smothers, to finish Justinian's wall, to people the fallen temples and the mortally wounded tetraphylles with the shades of those whom he particularly admires.

But this evocation was not permitted Lady Hester. Palmyra lived again. Palmyra was taking a new and different flight with all these Bedouins clinging to its ruined flanks as to the wrinkled visage of an old coquette whom paint and powder rejuvenate too much for recollection, not enough for credibility.

Across these steppes of gilded stones, from which stood out some beautiful columns intact and virginal, one could divine still the line of a triumphal portico. The great central arcade raised towards the sky its pillars fifty feet high, while the lateral arcades, more modest, framed it intermittently. Infinite rows of columns of a rose and yellow colour ; stone flesh caressed and polished by the burning and amorous suns of thousands of days ! Against each column leant a console bearing the statue of a celebrated

personage, perhaps one of those bold caravan leaders who, from the rivers Tigris or Ganges, had brought to Palmyra the brocades of Mosul and the silks of Baghdad, the glass-ware of Irak, the ivory sculptured in silver, the porcelains of China, the sandal-wood and the pearls. But the sands which swallow up everything, the living as the dead, had mingled the débris of the statues with the bones of the heroes. There remained only Greek or Palmyrian inscriptions half-eaten away by time.

What was, then, this prodigy ? On the iron props which formerly sustained the consoles, young girls were mounted. They kept their fifteen or sixteen year old bodies so perfectly rigid that from afar they looked like white statues. Their loose robes were twisted round their bodies in antique draperies ; they wore veils and garlands of flowers. On each side of the pillars, other young girls were grouped. And from one column to the other ran a string of beautiful brown children elevating thyrsi. While Lady Hester was passing these living statues remained motionless, but afterwards, springing from their pedestals, they joined the procession, dancing. The triumphal promenade continued for twelve hundred metres, to terminate in the final apotheosis. Suspended by a miracle to the top of the last arch, a young Bedouin girl deposited a crown on the head of Lady Hester.

Then the popular enthusiasm knew no longer any bounds. The poets—all the Arabs are poets—chanted verses in her praise, and the crowd took up the chorus, to the great displeasure of the forty camels, which protested loudly. The entire village was dancing in the steps of the stranger who had braved the seas and the deserts to come to it.

Lady Hester was at last satisfied. She was not astonished, for nothing could surpass her dreams of vengeance and her desire for glory. Why did they not see her entry into Palmyra, those detested English who had so disdainfully discarded her? Moore in his golden medallion took part in the fête.

By what was in former times a monumental staircase, but was now only dust, she arrived at the Temple of the Sun. Erected out of blocks of marble, it rose still great on the field of desolation and ruins. The gigantic walls of the sacred enclosure were crumbling in all parts, exposing the immense square court 250 metres in length which surrounded the sanctuary, to-day a mosque. As veritable butchers of art, the Arabs had slashed the sanctuary to dig there their dens, and the pure line of columns appeared to weep over this invasion of executioners. At her house the excited people left her.

Bruce and Meryon, who retained a strong academic tincture, had abundant leisure during

the quiet hours of that evening to recall their classical souvenirs. Zenobia and Hester Stanhope! What a vast horizon opens to all the meditations of history and philosophy! What a comparison to make between the former sovereign of Palmyra and her whom the Bedouins were already proclaiming their queen! Do they not yield to the ready temptation to compare.

What remained of Zenobia? A name on antique medals, a profile spoiled on old coins. She was beautiful, it appears, and the Eastern pearl was not more dazzling than her teeth. Her eyes were charming and full of fire and her figure majestic. The singularity of her dress answered to that of her character. She wore on her head a helmet surmounted by a ram's head and a flowing plume, and on her robe a bull's head of brass, for often she fought with the soldiers, her arms bare and a sword in her hand, and supported on horseback the most prolonged fatigue. Firmness in command, courage in reverses, loftiness of sentiments, diligence in business, dissimulation in politics, audacity without restraint, ambition without limits, such were, according to Trebellius Pollion, the defects and the accomplishments of this extraordinary woman.

Would one not say that he who traced this portrait had known Hester Stanhope? She added only to the outline of Zenobia six feet of height, her haughty features, her clear com-

plexion and Pitt's love of orating. But it is not sufficient to have a masculine costume to acquire virility and audacity, and it seems that under the cuirass embellished with jewels, as under the koumbaz and the machllah, the two strangers, though divided by sixteen centuries, in courage and ambition are sisters. Sisters also in their religious aspirations as numerous as different, in the eclecticism of their doctrines and their dogmas. They both belonged to that class of restless minds which is ever ready to welcome new and subversive philosophical theories, prompt to understand and to assimilate, prompt also to oblivion and to change.

Was Zenobia Jewess, Christian, polytheist or idealist? Greedy to know everything, she had drawn to her Court a disciple of Plotinus, Longinus, who professed the purest neo-Platonism, and Paul of Samosata, Archbishop of Antioch, a not very edifying Christian, whose subtle discussions on the mystery of the Incarnation prepared the coming of Nestorius. She had made of these two men who represented each two currents of ideas, if not hostile, at least dissimilar, her civil counsellors. In default of confession, deeds speak; and in this astonishing choice is betrayed the descendant of the Greeks dowered with that marvellous faculty of assimilation appropriate to her race which skims over everything without adhering to anything. And that

is why at Palmyra they walked on the ruins of a temple of Baal and a synagogue, of a church and of a temple of Diana.

And Lady Hester, had she beliefs more solidly established? She had grown and lived, she also, in the midst of a disturbance and tumult of ideas too contradictory to preserve a firm religion. The great breath of revolutionary theories set in motion by Rousseau had turned other heads better balanced than hers. If she did not founder, she contracted a sort of exalted misanthropy, peculiar to women, in which Byron and Goethe had a large share. The ground was prepared for the innumerable sects of the East, which multiply like mushrooms on a stormy day, to make spring up there the harvest of their philosophies and their revelations hostile and divine. She was no longer Anglican and not yet Mohammedan. Under cover of the good and accommodating Protestant arbitrator, she was able to invent a religion adapted to circumstances. As a country in danger launches a national loan, she will make an appeal every time. From some, she will borrow Fatalism; from others, the belief in the coming of a Messiah; from others, Biblical prophecies; from others, again, the existence of evil spirits.

And what resemblances between these two beautiful Amazons of the East! Soul intrepid and pride insensate. It is Zenobia, whose father

a magistrate of Palmyra, a simple curule edile charged with the policing of the frontiers, calling herself a King's daughter and of the lineage of Cleopatra, and exhibiting the table service of gold plate on which the Queen of Egypt was served at festivals at Alexandria ! It is Hester Stanhope, in her last years, deceived, robbed, devoured, despoiled by a pack of servants both numerous and greedy, replying to the doctor who was entreating her to reduce this clique : " Yes, but my rank ! "

Certainly, it is necessary to transpose the facts, the frame, the actors. It is necessary to lower the historical ladder to the rung of anecdote, but the quality of soul, does it not remain the same ? Setting aside all that modern civilisation has added or taken away from the manner of thinking, of living and of feeling in the third century, we may say that, if we invert the parts, if we make Hester Stanhope ascend the throne of Palmyra (she would have very much enjoyed that position), if we make Zenobia descend to the tent of the English traveller, they are not misplaced.

Hester Stanhope, would she not have deserved the praise of Aurelian writing of Zenobia, after having crushed at Antioch and at Emesa the heavy Palmyrian cavalry, the archers of Osrhoene and those impetuous bands of Arabs called so justly the brigands of Syria : " I should

prefer for my glory and my safety to deal with a man," she whose implacable hostility and proud resistance were to make Mahomet Ali and Ibrahim Pacha remark, twenty years later, that "the Englishwoman had given them more trouble to conquer than all the insurgents of Syria and Palestine."

Zenobia, shut up in Palmyra, besieged by the Roman legions who were digging mines to shake the solid ramparts at the angles crowned by towers, replied proudly to Aurelian, who offered her life in return for the surrender of the town :

"No one before thee has made in writing such a demand. In war, one obtains nothing save by courage. You tell me to surrender, as if you did not know that Queen Cleopatra preferred death to all the dignities which they promised her. The help of Persia will not fail me. I have on my side the Saracens and the Armenians. Conquered already by the brigands of Syria, Aurelian, wouldst thou be able to resist the troops which are expected from all parts? Then without doubt will fall that ridiculous pride which dares to order me to surrender, as if victory could not escape thee."

Lady Hester would willingly have signed this letter of which the biting tone and the emphatic turn would not have displeased her.

And when Lady Hester, grown old, without soldiers, without money, in her ruined castle of

the Lebanon, engaged in a savage and perpetual struggle with her terrible enemy, the Emir Bechir, will cry to an officer who was laying down his pistols and his sabre at the door of her room: "Take up thine arms! Dost thou think then that I am afraid of thee or thy master? I do not know what fear is. It is for him and those who serve him to tremble. And let not his son the Emir Khalil dare to place his foot here. I will kill him; it will not be my people who will shoot him; I will kill him myself with my own hand"; is it not easy to imagine that Zenobia would have used the same violence of language?

And of which might a biographer have written: "Her chastity was vaunted like her courage and she knew not love save for glory." Of Zenobia or of Lady Hester?

Only, only there always arrives a moment in which comparison stops; here it falls into an abyss. Zenobia was *Queen*. She ruled a people; she defended at once her country and her war-like renown. She had an object—an object of conquests to create an empire.

Lady Hester was a tourist. She conducted into the vast world the idle fancies of an empty heart. She defended her reputation of eccentric woman by vengeance, by bravado and by ennui. When a woman begins to know that she is eccentric, she is speedily unendurable. As for

political designs, did Lady Hester think of resuming on her own account the project of a Palmyrian empire. Bruce insinuated it, not without some irony. Perhaps he did not feel an inclination to play to the life the part of a Longinus, delivered up by Zenobia without remorse, condemned to death and walking to execution with a resigned serenity ! Who knows if she will not reveal herself another Zenobia, thought he, musing, and if she were not destined to bring back Palmyra to its former splendour ?

Perhaps will she form a matrimonial connection—the expression is his—with Ebu Sihoud, the King of the Wahabis. Oh ! evidently, he was not represented as a very amorous object. He had a harsh look, a bronzed skin, and a black beard and disposition, but he was undoubtedly the richest monarch in the whole world. After the sack of 1806, strings of camels had left Mecca, carrying to Derayah, the white Wahabi capital, defended by its thick woods of palm-trees and its ramparts of piled-up date-stones, all the presents which the faithful disciples of Mohammed had sent to the prophet's tomb since the beginning of the Hegira. Throne of massive gold incrustated with pearls and diamonds, the gift of a gorgeous King of Persia who had done much killing, crowns enriched with precious stones, lamps of silver and emerald, diamonds of the size of walnuts. That is sufficient to tempt the most

sensible of young women, even if the prospective husband possesses a savage character and a sanguinary reputation. And for a sportswoman, what attraction in the sight of the royal stables? Eighty white mares with skins shining like silver, ranged in a single row, so incomparable and so exactly alike that one could not recognise one from the other, and one hundred and twenty others of different coats and admirably shaped!

As so many less celebrated households, Ebu Sihoud and Hester Stanhope, sacrificing love to ambition, would join hands, would bring a great revolution into religion and politics and shake the throne of the Sultan to its base.

Would a general be required? By Jupiter! General Oakes was distinctly marked out. How agreeable it would be to him to learn the art of war under the orders of a chief so distinguished! And these Wahabis! Ah! what a magnificent people! Like the barbarians rolling in hordes, with women, children and baggage, over the wreck of the Roman Empire, they formed an immense army, which was transported from one desert to another with dizzy rapidity. These shepherds were warriors with all their souls. Let Turkey take care! Despite the victories of Mahomet Ali, they extended their empire from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea. Bruce divined the prophecy that a warrior of Ebu Sihoud had proclaimed several years before: "The time

approaches in which we shall see an Arab seated on the throne of the Caliphs. We have long enough languished under the yoke of a usurper ! ”

But the night enveloped the recollections, and Bruce went to bed, abandoning the phantoms of Aurelian, Zenobia and the Wahabis to the thin crescent moon which was streaking with silver the sadness of the ruins.

Lady Hester, having learned of the gossip of all fashionable Palmyra on the subject of the treasures which she was reputed to seek, adopted a radical means of getting rid for ever of such a belief. She called for her horse, and the sheik of the village followed her on foot. The poor little tired-out man, little curious to admire the ruins amidst which he had always lived, trotting behind, perspiring and puffing, demanded mercy and confessed himself beaten. Surrounded by children and women skipping like sloughs and running under the horses' hoofs to point out the best way across the network of ruins, the travellers reached the Saracen castle, whose flayed-alive walls dominated Palmyra. They leant their elbows on the remains of the ramparts. At their feet, slept the buried queen of the desert. These endless rose-coloured columns appeared at a distance the plaything of some child giant forgotten on the sand. Soon tired, the child has walked on his fragile constructions, and the arcades and the temples have fallen in ;

some sections of the walls which have escaped this joyous massacre alone remain. Feathery palm-trees and pale banana-trees, like green favours which little fingers have thrown to earth, spring up at random.

At the warm sulphur springs of Ephca, Lady Hester attended the bath of a young married Bedouin woman. In former times, the girls of Palmyra, "proud and tender at the same time, born of the mingling of the races of Greece and Asia, passed for the most beautiful of the East." The beauty of the women had survived empires, palaces and temples, and the sheiks of the desert came continually to the ruins of Tadmora in search of wives, for whom they paid very dearly.

Preceded by torch-bearers, Lady Hester visited the mosque. She stopped for a long time before the sculptured ceiling on which could still be made out the twelve signs of the Chaldean Zodiac. The astrologers, from the depths of their mysterious chapels, had they predicted to Zenobia the flight towards the Euphrates, the ascent to the Capitol under the chains of gold, and the villa on the pleasant slopes of Tivoli. And Lady Hester, in the presence of those stars which were crumbling slowly in the gloom and the silence, had she the presentiment of her solitary destiny in a shaking castle?

All went for the best, until one day Nasr surprised four Faydams roaming round the springs.

Captured, two amongst them evaded the vigilance of their guards and fled during the night. At this news, Nasr, tearing his hair, cried out like one possessed and declared that it was necessary to leave without delay, for the fugitives had gone to warn their tribe of the rich booty which awaited them. The departure was fixed for the next day.

For the last time Lady Hester went over her realm. The setting sun reanimated the jagged skeleton of the dead town. The tall columns sparkled like candles. The night was transparent, the sky of velvet, in which the golden stars trembled with a beauty which oppressed the heart. In an uncovered space of the ruins of the temple, the servants had lighted a great fire. They were giving a farewell reception. The flames revealed dark faces and wild gambols. Pierre, naturally, was recounting his history, and all bent their heads to listen to him, sometimes mimicking the narrator, sometimes repeating in chorus an astonishing passage. A Bedouin was explaining, in his manner, the great deeds of Napoleon :

“The French are supernatural beings ; their weapons of war are more terrible than thunder. They have cannon which discharge balls of a size which cannot be measured ; and, extraordinary thing ! very often these balls remain quiet for a moment. Then, at the moment when one

thinks the least of them, they open with a crash and destroy everything which surrounds them (*bombs*). They have, besides, the gift of multiplying at will, for often one sees a little troop advancing, which, at the moment when one thinks the least of it, extends, multiplies and covers sometimes a plain of which they occupied at first only a little part (*square battalions*). Finally, they possess guns with which they fire often fifteen or twenty shots without needing to reload; it is a continual fire (*line or platoon firing*). There are among them soldiers who wear tall caps of hair; ho! those men are terrible; one is enough to bring to the ground six Arab horsemen. The country which they inhabit is very far from here; it is separated from us by the sea. Ah, well! if they desired, they would succeed in passing under it and would arrive here in the twinkling of an eye. . . .” The jargon of the women, kept apart from these fraternal love-feasts, alone rent the darkness.

On April 4, at dawn, the Bedouins, excited by the arrival of the Faydans, broke up the camp in all haste. Lady Hester was broken-hearted at leaving without saying good-bye. As for the doctor, he was chiefly anxious to procure the recipe for a sweet sauce to eat with hare, in which figured dried raisins and onions. That interested him much more than all the ruins of creation. Nasr, through calculation or through

fear of losing the deposit entrusted to Muly Ismael, hastened the march, allowing respite neither to beasts nor men. He was not reassured until after having crossed the Belaz mountains and fallen in with the tribe of the Sebah and many other Bedouin tribes which were posted on the path of the Syt.

Lady Hester was thirty-seven years of age at this period, but her dazzling beauty was able to face the double proof of broad daylight and popular infatuation. Lovingly thousands of women—whom she had, besides, overwhelmed with handkerchiefs and necklaces—surrounded her. All the men, fascinated by her manner of mounting half-wild horses, proclaimed her *Queen*, and made her enter their tribe, giving her, as to a child of the desert, the right of recommending travellers. It is then that a Bedouin, carried away by the cavalcades, the cheering and the general enthusiasm, threw down his keffiye, crying: “Let them give me a hat, and I will go to England!”

Lady Hester learned afterwards that 300 Faydan horsemen had pursued the caravan, but having fallen foul of the rearguard of the Sebabs, they had abandoned a game lost in advance. There had been some wounded, and the doctor was requested to give them his attention. But what was he to do with the light-hearted fellows who washed their wounds with

the urine of camels and who, after some days of this treatment, were in perfect health ! It is useless to be fastidious ; it is too disconcerting.

In the midst of an extraordinary concourse of admirers and spectators, Lady Hester returned to her pleasant villa at Hama. Nasr drew his 2000 piastres and returned to his desert, quite contented. How far is this modest sum from the 30,000 piastres which a number of travellers benevolently lent him, Didot at their head ! As for the two Bedouins whom Lady Hester had brought with the intention of exhibiting them later in England, they pined away so rapidly, they assumed so quickly a pitiable and sickly appearance, that she was obliged to send them back without delay to their vermin and their sun.

CHAPTER IX

FROM THE TEMPLE OF BAALBECK TO THE RUINS OF ASCALON

LADY HESTER, whose health was detestable, hoped that a new sky and a new climate would bring her that cure which always persisted in fleeing before her. On May 10, 1813, she left the enchantress Hama without regrets. The sun was scorching and the marching hours very trying, but Lady Hester, who never permitted herself to be inconvenienced, slept late and preferred to allow the porters to sweat blood and water at high noon. The caravan went back towards the north, so far as Latakia, where the traveller calculated to embark for Russia and perhaps for the Indies. Meantime, she maintained an active correspondence with Ebir Sihoud, the King of the Wahabis, her credulous imagination being stimulated by the Bedouin stories about this prince, who had presented himself with 800 wives. The doctor did not succeed in ascertaining what were her intentions, until she was about to depart. "It is to be hoped that she has no idea of making an excursion to Derazeh,"

said he in alarm ; “ she would be capable of taking me ! ”

The route, meadows spotted with mauve flowers in which the horses sank, followed the Orontes, dominated by the Ansaries mountains, a rugged chain still covered by a coating of snow.

Only, there arrived a thing which was not expected ; the plague made its appearance and reigned as a harsh mistress over the Syrian coast. European vessels fled from the contaminated ports. Lady Hester accordingly hired a house and waited, without impatience, for the country was beautiful. All the summer she hunted the hares, the partridges, the francolins and the gazelles which abounded in the woods of olive and sycamore-trees on the bank of the Nahr-el-Kebir. Mr. Barker, the consul at Aleppo, had brought his little family.

On October 7, Bruce, recalled suddenly to England, set out for Aleppo with Beaudin. He was leaving his friend for a long time. What happened at this departure, which was to be without return ? And, first, what was he in regard to Lady Hester. Simple travelling companion or lover ? The doctor observes on this subject a discretion wholly professional. He remarks that Bruce, during the three years in which he travelled over the East with her, derived much from the fruit of her experience of the world and her conversation. We know

nothing in reality. But who knows if Bruce did not think of Lady Hester what Heinrich Heine was to say later of Marie Kalergis : " She is not a woman ; she is a monument ; she is the cathedral of the god Love." And men do not much care about falling at the feet of cathedrals ; they fear the gossip of the idlers, and they have too much difficulty in getting up again afterwards.

The plague was causing great havoc, redoubling its efforts, and established itself in the centre of the town. The Arabs, besides, referred the matter to Mohammed, and took no further precautions or remedies. Barker lost his two little girls. And, on the eve of starting for Sidon, Lady Hester, who had definitely renounced the idea of returning to Europe, was brought down ; she also, by the disease. In the evening, the doctor was attacked by fever. Although hardly able to stand, he remained, none the less, at the pillow of the sick woman, for whom he disputed three weeks with death. The servants were struck down, and Latakia was shaken by a violent storm. The water entered in streams through the cracked roof, and they were obliged to move Lady Hester's bed incessantly to prevent it from being flooded. On December 15, she had a relapse ; finally, on January 6, 1814, they succeeded in hoisting her into the boat which was to take her to Sidon.

In the environs of that town, the Greek patriarch Athanasius had let to her, for a mere nothing, the Monastery of Mar-Elias. This monastery, built on a bare spur of the Lebanon, commanded a view of the Syrian Sea. Small and dilapidated, it had the privilege of preserving in its walls the body of the last patriarch seated in his chair. Unpleasant detail: he had been badly embalmed and recalled himself to the sense of smell of his faithful friends in an ill-timed manner.

It is at this moment that Lady Hester changed in character. Her convalescence being prolonged, she became simple in her habits up to cynicism. She displayed in her conversation a bitter and singularly acute spirit, judging men as though she were reading from an open book in their hearts. She found some consolations in a Sphinx-like attitude, and being well acquainted with the undercurrents and the mechanism of European politics, she was able to afford herself the luxury of predictions realisable and rather often realised.

The plague, which the winter had for some months benumbed, resumed with the spring its victorious march. It broke out everywhere with a new violence, at Damascus, at Sidon, at Bairout, at Homs. The doctor hoped that the scourge would spare the little hamlet of Abra, some metres from the monastery where he had

his quarters. But the late passion for cleanliness of a peasant named Constantine, who, at the age of sixty years, never having taken warm baths, went to obtain them at Sidon, was the cause of all the evil. He brought back the plague. Then terror seized upon the village. The peasants fled into the mountain with their cattle and their silk-worms ; and there was no one to remove the dead bodies, which decomposed where they lay and increased the infection. The doctor, having no longer permission to cross the threshold of the monastery, communicated with Lady Hester through the window, and his servant Giovanni having fallen ill, he was also regarded as suspect and remained abandoned, with the agreeable prospect of doing his own cooking and washing his own dishes.

The month of May was by misfortune particularly hot. There were scenes which nothing will ever surpass in horror. A peasant of the name of Shahud lost his only son, whom he adored. He carried him himself to the common grave ; but having loosened the stone and perceived the body of that accursed Constantine, he was seized with madness. He threw himself on the corpse to give it as food to the jackals. But death had done its work better ; the limb by which he had intended to seize him remained in his hand. What a spectacle ! Before the half-open charnel-house, this peasant, with distracted air, brandish-

ing a piece of a corpse, curses and insults it while almost choking ! And all around the beautiful and fresh country under the blue sky. . . .

Then life resumes all its rights. The village forgot the death-rattle of the dying and resounded soon with songs and careless laughter. Constantine's eldest son, who had been about to be married, being dead, he was replaced immediately by his young brother. The bridegroom was only thirteen, and cast envious glances in the direction of the companions of his own age, who were dancing merrily, without looking at his wife, who was three years older than himself, it is true.

To recover from all these emotions, Lady Hester resolved to visit Baalbeck. She set out on October 18, and, from fear of the plague, she carried away provisions for the entire journey. She will not become an accomplished fatalist until many years afterwards. . . . She conceived even meat-puddings, which were theoretically to keep for several months and which set the teeth of the escort on edge, so invincible were their hardness and dryness ! A thing decided upon being for her a thing done, the doctor was obliged to put up with the puddings, not without sadness. She had also the idea of travelling on donkeys, she and all her people. She had time to spare, and she was incensed at the complete oblivion in which her relatives and friends in

England had left her. She thought in this way to attract the attention of the consuls and the merchants, and to make the disgrace of this equipage fall upon all those who ought to have watched over her welfare. A Pitt travelling on a donkey! What a bomb in Downing Street! Yes, but the absent go quickly.

The plain of the Bekaa brought them comfortably to Baalbeck. The camp was pitched beyond the town, at the springs of the Litani. From Ras-el-Aia the travellers contemplated one of the most beautiful districts of Asia, and every evening they found a new charm. In the distance, the great white sheik, the solemn Hermon, the slopes of the Lebanon, the deep and quiet valley showing the harmony of its verdure, wearied and fatigued by the summer, around the Temple of Baal, the six columns light, exquisite, fragile and, nevertheless, living symbol of strength and eternity. And to give to this country of light a more human beauty, tents scattered at the foot of a mosque and long flocks of reddish and grey sheep coming to drink.

What were Lady Hester's feelings? What reflections assailed her when she walked in the Acropolis, traversing the courts surrounded by exedras, encountering the capitals in rose-coloured granite of Hassouan, the lustral basins with sculptures so delicate that the tritons and the chariots appeared cameos, passing under the

compartment-ceilings of the Temple of Bacchus, halting, in astonishment, before the principal arch of the door, of which the audacious jet cleaves the sky, before the walls where, amongst the stone lacework, are found everywhere the egg and the arrow, emblem of life and of death ?

The doctor is a confidant too discreet. His personal taste leads him to deplore the gigantic stones which form the sub-basement of the temple. He does not like the Trilithon ! He finds that the colossal dimensions of the three monoliths are not in harmony with the rest of the edifice and destroy all symmetry ! But it is an opinion in which he stands quite alone.

He was not able to resist the pleasure of writing on the walls of the temple some verses in honour of Lady Hester :

*Quam multa antiquis sunt his incisa columeni
Nomina ! cum saxo mox peritura simul,
Sed tu nulla times oblivia ; fama superstes,
Esther, si pereant marmora, semper erit !*

The intention was amiable, if the result were mediocre. But Lady Hester caused them to be effaced promptly.

“ I have made it a rule,” said she to him more frankly than courteously, “ since I entered Society, never to allow people to write verses about me. If I had been willing, I should have had thousands of poets to celebrate me in every way, but I consider there is nothing so ridiculous.

Look at the Duchess of Devonshire, who receives every morning a sonnet on her drive, an impromptu on her headache, and a crowd of other absurdities. I abominate that sort of thing."

The doctor took it for granted.

The weather suddenly changed, and on November 7 the caravan started for the Neck of Cedars, which the snows were threatening to obstruct. The travellers were swept by one of those frightful storms of which the countries of the East possess the secret; tents torn down, lanterns and fires extinguished, the mountain shaken and trembling, howling of the wind. The muleteers prudently vanished, fearing a night service. They crossed the neck at last, leaving on their right the cedars to which the doctor compares those of Warwick, scarcely less beautiful, and descended on the villages of Becherre and Ehden, by a straight passage which would have frightened many expert horsemen. Some miles from Ehden, there was, in the middle of the mountain, clinging to the rock, suspended above the abyss in which the Nadicha rumbles, a famous monastery, the Monastery of St. Anthony. Miracles were there more specially reserved for epileptics and the mentally afflicted; but St. Anthony was far more indebted for his celebrity to the violent and implacable hostility which he showed towards all representatives of the weak sex without exception. The Moslems ought to venerate a saint

so judicious. Not only had no woman ever passed the threshold of the convent, but female animals themselves were rigorously shut up, from fear of their mingling with the privileged males in the forbidden precincts. It was this reason which decided Lady Hester to make a *détour* in order to go to brave a saint so little gallant. She invited the superior in her own convent, associating with him, for form's sake, some sheiks of the village, and making a courteous allusion to the firman of the Sultan which gave her the right to enter every place. She went to the monastery mounted on a she-ass—double sacrilege ! When she entered the court, all the onlookers, monks and servants, expected the earth to open under the feet of the impudent women to swallow her up. But all passed off excellently, and she visited the monastery from top to bottom. At every door there was a violent altercation which threatened to turn to fisticuffs between the feminist and anti-feminist clans of the monks. The meal was long and plentiful. St. Anthony lost his prestige ; that of Lady Hester increased in proportion.

Tripoli, where Lady Hester occupied, for several months, an uninhabited convent of the Capuchins, had as military governor Mustafa Aga Barbar. Of very low origin, the son of a muleteer, he had, at the head of a band of resolute fellows, captured the fortress of the town by surprise.

The people, who detested the janissaries, had risen in revolt with him, and a firman of the Porte confirmed him in the post which he had usurped, for in the East the strongest reason is always the best. He received Lady Hester with a homely simplicity which contrasted with the stiff politeness of the Turks. She made on him a lasting impression.

In January 1815, Lady Hester returned to Mar-Elias. Scarcely had she alighted from her donkey than she received horrible news, brought back from Bairout by Beaudin : a Capugi Bachi had arrived, demanding her with hue and cry ! Everyone knows that a Capugi Bachi does not come into a province except to give orders for strangulation, hanging, imprisonment and the bastinado, never for an agreeable object. Lady Hester smiled slyly and sent a pressing message to the Capugi Bachi, who arrived at the end of dinner. Beaudin and Meryon, who had decorated their girdles with pistols, regarded with a hostile eye this little man who came to disturb their digestion. They were far from expecting the reality.

An attack of plague would have sufficed as occupation to the average woman ; nevertheless, it was during her illness that Lady Hester drew up a plan of campaign around an old manuscript which had fallen by chance into her hands, and which indicated the site where fabulous riches

had been concealed in the ruins of Sidon and Ascalon. Treasures? Nothing was impossible. In the East the inhabitants possess no certainty of preserving their property. Deprived of banks, deprived of paper-money easy to handle, subject to the arbitrary will of avaricious governors, living in the midst of perpetual wars and troubles—in twenty years Tripoli had been besieged five times and five times sacked—they have only one resource: a good and mysterious hiding-place, unknown to all and particularly to their women.

Moreover, the people divided European travellers into three categories: exiles, spies and treasure-seekers. Lady Hester strongly suspected the Porte of laying a trap for her, but it was too dangerous to place herself in the first categories of foreigners, and she played the part of one who believed in the manuscript. A little time afterwards, she was to believe in it in reality and blindly.

To finish gaining the Turkish Government, she begged Sir Robert Liston, British Ambassador, to present the project to the Reis Effendi, insisting on the fact that all the money would belong to the Sultan; she reserved only for herself the glory of the discoveries. As for the expenses, nothing was more simple; England would pay the bill. "If the Government refuses," said she, "I shall send it to the news-

papers. It is a right and certainly not a favour. Sir Edward Paget, when Ambassador at Vienna, made Mr. Pitt pay him £70,000 for the liveries of his servants during four years. I do not see why I should not do the same thing."

The Turkish Government, delighted at an affair in which there would be everything to gain and nothing to lose, immediately despatched Darwish Mustapha Aga Capugi Bachi, who was to place himself under Lady Hester's orders and to invest her with an authority which no European ambassador or non-official Christian had ever had, and still less a woman. He was the bearer of firmans for the Pacha of Acre, for the Pacha of Damascus and for all the governors of Syria.

Scarcely disembarked from Baalbeck, Lady Hester launched into a formidable and arduous undertaking. But she adored action. And then what excitement to command! What joy to reign without control over these Orientals created and placed in the world to obey! General-in-chief on the eve of delivering battle, she despatched messengers. Quick! a line to Malim Musa, of Hama, who will be her good counsellor and will watch the Capugi Bachi: "You know that I do not travel by roundabout ways; an urgent affair calls for your presence at Acre." Quick! a letter to Soliman Pacha to explain the matter to him and to demand his help.

Mar-Elias, transformed into headquarters, resounded with the galloping of horses which were departing or arriving, resounded with a thousand orders which intersected one another from morning till evening. The excitement increased. The grooms kept their animals in readiness for departure. Giorgio and the Capugi Bachi went to Acre to reconnoitre. Beaudin recruited mules. The doctor gained Damascus with all speed to procure what was wanting for the expedition, and found time to see Fatimah again, but a Fatimah marked by the plague, with eyes grown dull and sallow face.

Lady Hester's caravan followed the coast. At St. Jean d'Acre the curious admiration of the crowd was transformed into a salutary fear for the Syt who enjoyed so much influence at the Court of the Sultan. The doctor, who had naturally remained behind and naturally been overtaken by a storm—already in returning from Damascus he had been buried in a tempest of snow—arrived soaked and in a bad temper at the encampment at Haifa, and was disagreeably surprised to find in the dining-tent a rough and dirty individual.

Rather tall, with bold and haughty features and the remains of good looks travestied by dirt, he wore long and dirty hair and a Spanish surtout of the most shabby description. His mutilated left hand was making ostensible efforts

to disappear beneath a red handkerchief, while his right hand flourished a Bible recklessly.

General Loustaunau presented himself to the considerably astonished doctor, who recognised him, by his way of saluting, for a Frenchman.

General he was, but in the Indies, and he did not require pressing to relate his history, which approached, perhaps a little artificially, the epopee.

Of a family of poor peasants of the Pyrenees, he was born at the little town of Aïdens. Early, he intended to seek his fortune in America, but on arriving at Bordeaux and learning that a ship was about to sail for the Indies, he suddenly changed his mind and joined it as a sailor. The *Sartine* weighed anchor in September, 1777. She carried away a young man more rich in hopes than in cash, but who possessed a fine presence, robust health and an astonishing activity, thanks to which he was going to make his way quickly.

Disembarked at Poonah, he contrived to attract the attention of M. de Marigny, the French Ambassador, who was accustomed to say to him: "You, you are not an ordinary type." The empire of the Mahrattas was at that time a land consecrated to political intrigues. The emperor had been assassinated, leaving an infant son. The Prince Ragova, his brother, who was not perhaps a stranger to the murder, claimed

the throne, supported by the English, while the Rajahs Nassaphermis and Sindhia ranged themselves on the side of the legitimate heir.

War having broken out, Loustaunau, who was dying with envy to see a battle, demanded authorisation to go to the Mahratta camp. His reply to M. de Marigny's objections was simple : " If I am killed, well ! good day, and it will be finished ! "

M. de Marigny gave him a recommendation to General Norolli, a Portuguese who commanded the rajah's artillery. On the field of battle, Loustaunau observed everything and followed with interest the movements of the army. The English were entrenched on an eminence, and had there established batteries which were making great havoc in the ranks of the Mahrattas. Loustaunau observed a height which dominated the enemy's position, and which was easily accessible to the rajah's troops.

To General Norolli, who was passing, Loustaunau pointed out the spot, offering him the possibility of reducing the English artillery to silence. But Norolli, swollen with the distrust which the military man always has for the civilian, shrugged his shoulders before this beardless youth who was presuming to meddle with strategy. However, an old officer, who had heard the conversation, asked him what he thought of their artillery.

“ If I were a flatterer,” he replied, “ I should say that it is excellent ; but, as I am not, I permit myself to say that it is detestable.”

“ Ah, nonsense ! and what would you do if you had the command ? ”

“ As for what is the command, I know not the devil a bit about it. But the only thing to do, if I had cannon, is what I have said.”

“ I shall perhaps be able to give them you. What would you do ? ”

“ I should place them up there, and I swear on my head that it would not take long.”

The Frenchman’s assurance, his determination, his audacity, made an impression on the officer, who brought Loustaunau before Sindhia.

“ Let them give him ten pieces of artillery and the best gunners,” said Sindhia. “ Only let him make haste, for the situation is infernal.”

Rapidly placed in position, Loustaunau’s cannon caused the ammunition waggons of the enemy to explode, throwing the English camp into disorder, and certainly deciding the fate of the battle. Congratulated by the rajah, who offered him presents and a command in his army, Loustaunau declined both before returning to M. de Marigny. Scarcely had he left Sindhia’s tent than he was rudely apostrophised by General Norolli, green with concentrated and suppressed rage.

“ Who has authorised you, Monsieur,” cried

he, "to present yourself to the rajah without my permission? You are well aware that it is I who introduce all Europeans."

"General, I went in response to a summons from his Highness. If you were enraged because I have been fortunate enough to render him a small service, do not forget that it was to you first of all that I pointed out the site of the battery. You refused to listen to me, and if others after you have followed my advice, it is your fault and not mine."

"Monsieur, you would deserve that I put this whip about your shoulders."

"Your anger is taking away your reason, General. If you have some blows of a whip to deal out, reserve them for your Portuguese; the French are not accustomed to receive them."

Norolli laid his hand on his pistol, but Loustau-nau was watching him and was ready to throw himself upon him. Officers separated them.

Some weeks later, M. de Marigny having been recalled to France, Loustau-nau accepted the rajah's offer. He raised a corps of 2000 men, called "the French detachment," of which he reserved to himself the absolute and uncontrolled command, and, at the head of his wild Rohillas, he performed wonders. The English were obliged to sign peace, delivering up Ragova and engaging to restore all the strong towns which they had captured.

Brave, clear-sighted, of sound political views, thoroughly qualified to command, this little peasant had in him the stuff of which a leader is made, and so well did he distinguish himself that he was appointed general of Sindhia's troops. He was not going to remain long inactive, for the English, faithful to the astute tactics which they had adopted in the Indies, employed in turn the troops of Bengal, those of Bombay and those of Coromandel. In this way, the treaties of the one appeared not to bind the others and they escaped serious reverses, while profiting by their partial successes. Soon General Garderre, at the head of 15,000 sepoys of Bengal, invaded the Mahratta country. But Loustauau was on the watch, and the enemy's army was completely routed. It was at the end of a murderous combat that a stray ball carried away Loustauau's left hand. He had a silver hand carved for himself of ingenious workmanship. Clever idea, for the bonzes prostrated themselves as he passed along, whispering opportune prophecies announcing that "it was written in the Temple of Siva that the Mahrattas would attain their highest point of glory under a man who had come from far countries of the West, who would wear a silver hand and be invincible." Then he tasted the intoxicating joy of popularity and, what was better, the Imperial favours. He lived in a palace furnished in Eastern style, with

thirty elephants, five hundred horses, and servants in profusion. Two colossal silver hands placed at his gate informed all the Hindus of his glorious titles.

But the tenacious English launched a third army under the command of General Camac. Lous-taunau annihilated it, as he had the two others. In vain Camac tried to withstand him; the sepoys, terrified by the fearlessness of the Mahrattas and by the colossal silver hands which served them as banners, beat a retreat. Lous-taunau had paid dearly for the victory; he had been wounded in the shoulder and in the foot. General Camac, charmed by his courage, sent him his own surgeon to operate on him. But Lous-taunau declined his services, not wishing, said he, to owe anything to his enemies. The rajahs proclaimed him, "the Lion of the State and the Tiger in war." His renown extended rapidly through the Indies, and some Frenchmen who were serving in the English army deserted in order to go to him. The English sent an officer, Mr. Quipatrick, to demand the fugitives. Lous-taunau refused to give them up. Sindhia sent him an order to obey. Then he proposed to Mr. Quipatrick to follow him into the camp of the Rohillas to receive the deserters. He ordered the signal to saddle to be sounded, and the Rohillas drew their sabres.

"They demand your brothers," said he, "and

those whom a noble confidence has brought to you ; are you willing to give them up ? . . . As for me, so long as my right hand will be able to handle a sabre, never will I give up my countrymen to death."

The English officer was obliged to go back again with an empty bag.

However, a swarm of fellow-countrymen—the rumour of his fortune had reached Béarn—pounced down, one fine morning, upon his cake. He shared generously with them and found a place for them in brilliant affairs. Between two campaigns, he had married Mlle. Poulet, daughter of a French officer who had not been successful and was vegetating sadly in the Indies.

Loustaunau had, however, difficult times. Having aroused the jealousy of a vizier who refused him subsidies, he was obliged, during a war against the Prince of Lahore, to provide, at his own expense, the pay and the revictualling of his troops. To put an end to such abuses, he galloped so far as Delhi, threatened the vizier with his pistols and compelled him to sign an order for 4,500,000 rupees to reimburse him.

Sooner or later, the exile hears the call of country. Eighteen years of adventurous life had not made Loustaunau forget the sweetness of certain summer evenings in the valleys of

the Pyrenees. Suddenly, he decided to return. In a few days he realised 8,000,000 rupees, which he had transferred to France, through the agency of M. Dewerines, a merchant at Chandernagore. To the Catholic church at Delhi he left lands which were worth a rental of 30,000 rupees and assured the fortune of all his comrades in glory. He took leave of Sindhia, who made him the most brilliant promises in order to retain him.

"Thy departure," said he, "means the triumph of the English, the ruin of thy new country; thine was ungrateful; it did not know thy worth, since thou didst arrive here poor. The Mahrattas will, moreover, do for thee four times more than they have done. Thou art as powerful as I am; I love thee as my father. Thus thou canst not think of leaving us."

But Loustau nau listened to no one; he took his departure, surrounded by an immense population, which gave vent to loud lamentations, for the protection of the bonzes had made of him a being almost divine.

Good fortune grew weary of following him and abandoned him on his departure from the Indies. Starting from that moment, checks and reverses will succeed to successes and triumphs with a mathematical precision. Bad passage of seven months. Arrival at Versailles. Loustau nau had truly chosen his hour well! The Revolution was scenting bankruptcy. And the

beautiful millions of the East melted like snow in the sun. He was paid in assignats, and scarcely drew 200,000 francs from this fine financial operation. Without being discouraged, he established a foundry on the frontiers of Spain; but the wars ruined it completely. He dispersed gradually all the valuable jewels which he had brought back from the Indies and formed the vigorous resolution to start again for Delhi to seek the wreck of his fortune. He left at Tarbes five children, three sons and two daughters. A magnificent ruby, the last gift of Sindhia, which he had pawned at Paris, was to pay the expenses of the journey.

Not being able to find in Egypt the facilities he desired to embark for India, he proceeded to Syria, with the intention of joining the caravan which left Damascus for Bassora. But he fell dangerously ill at Acre. His intellectual faculties, affected by so many extraordinary events, broke down in an alarming fashion. He was seized by a religious exaltation and by an unfortunate devotion, for he distributed to his neighbours the money which remained to him. And Lous-taunau lived on alms in a miserable hut in the orchards of Acre. "The Lion of the State and the Tiger in war" wandered miserably across the country. Having retained the recollection of the brilliant part which prophecies had played in his splendid past, he was seized with a passion

for the Bible, and made it his study to find a link between present events and ancient narrations. People called him "the prophet" and respected his inoffensive folly.

On learning of the arrival of Lady Hester, he had hastened to her, armed with a thousand sacred texts announcing her coming. He imagined, besides, that she was on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but he was not embarrassed to give another direction to his prophecies. Lady Hester received him very cordially, divining immediately what marvellous advantage she might derive, not from his flashes of lucidity which revealed the keen good sense of the peasant, lofty sentiments and an astonishing memory, but from his Biblical extravagances. In consequence, she bestowed upon him alms in abundance. Mentally, she already relegated Pierre to the rank of minor prophet.

Loustaunau withdrew soon in torrents of rain. The tents were overturned like umbrellas, and Lady Hester had two narrow escapes of being buried under her own. But it was said that that evening the doctor did not have a moment's respite and that the march past of frightened people did not cease. Towards midnight they came to inform him that a Frank had arrived from Acre. He hastened into the dining-tent and found a young Dalmatian who was about to put on the uniform of an officer of the British

Navy. Signor Thomaso Coschich—he bore this sonorous name—explained with much importance and volubility that he had been dragoman to the Princess of Wales during her journey from Palermo to Constantinople ; that he had crossed the Mediterranean, in the midst of war, on a walnut-shell, so well that the fishermen of Cyprus had not recovered from their astonishment, and that he had come to find Lady Hester to take her back to England.

Then he handed to the dumbfounded doctor despatches from Sir Sydney Smith, of the highest importance, and which would not suffer any delay. Lady Stanhope was charged to transmit several letters to the Emir Bechir. There were many things in these letters, in truth. Sir Sydney Smith began by reproaching the emir harshly with having allowed the eyes of his nephews to be put out (Bechir had charged himself with the business). “I hope,” wrote he, “that you will not deprive them of your protection ; I hold you responsible to me for their safety.” He demanded the 15,000 men which Bechir had promised to furnish to hunt down the pirates of Algiers. He sent him their banners and the plans of campaign approved by Austria, Russia, Prussia, France, the Emperor of Morocco and the Dey of Tunis—nothing except that. Finally, being very much in debt and in a most precarious situation, he reckoned on Lady Hester, his dear

cousin, to obtain a little loan from her Syrian friends !

Lady Hester, congratulating herself on having put her nose into this correspondence, which smelt of powder, suspended for three days the march of the caravan, in order to compose her answers and to get rid as quickly as possible of the embarrassing personality of Thomaso Coschich. This imbecile, in order to get the gates of Acre to open to him during the night, had declared that war was about to be declared between Russia and Turkey, and that, as England was taking an important part in it, he was to conduct Lady Hester to a place of safety. True Knight of Fortune, indiscreet, noisy, quarrelsome, swollen with vanity, loud in bragging, his rodomontades produced a disastrous effect on the Turks, who rarely understand pleasantry and never ridicule.

Lady Hester decided to put a stop to the negotiations and wrote to Sir Sydney Smith that his idea was stupid ; that Bechir had too many enemies to deprive himself of 15,000 men like that ; that his men did not fight well except with their mountains behind them, which they would not consent to leave ; that it was impossible, however, to carry them away with them, and that, moreover, as Bechir possessed no port, he would have to obtain the authorisation of the Pacha of Acre to embark them. And,

alluding to the frightful banners in German cotton-cloth which Sir Sydney Smith had sent, she inquired who was the king of pocket-handkerchiefs.

Beyond that, she immediately despatched copies of Sir Sydney Smith's letters and her own to Mr. Liston (Constantinople) and Mr. Barker (Aleppo), begging the latter to stop all the letters which he might suppose were coming from Sir Sydney Smith to the Emir Bechir. Bechir made faces at the passage relating to his nephews, but he broke out into a cold sweat when he thought of all the vexations which the absurd intervention of the Commodore might have brought upon him but for the prudent and circumspect conduct of Lady Hester. The Porte was not to be trifled with when an alliance with European nations was in question, and his head would have leaped like a cork.

As for the presents, they denoted a complete misunderstanding of the customs, policy and religions of the East. Sir Sydney Smith sent Abu Gosh a pair of pistols—at a time when the Turks, when they received arms from England, wanted English arms—the Emir Bechir, a black satin abaye—it was just as though someone had offered Sir Sydney Smith a pair of cretonne breeches—to his wife a work-basket; to the library of Jerusalem (there was not one) a Bible; to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre a portrait

of the Pope, when all the sects which were tearing away the Holy Places had nothing in common except their quarrels.

The Emir Bechir received the presents graciously, but did not exhibit them, nor did he ever speak of them, and it is probable that his sons no longer demanded news of Sir Sydney Smith from all travelling Europeans at Beit-ed-Dui, as they had done up to the present.

At Jaffa, a firman of Soliman ordered Mohammed Aga to accompany Lady Hester. How he would have liked to transfer the duty to another ! For Lady Hester, remembering his apathy in 1812, treated him with the most utter disdain, crushing him beneath a contempt fallen from very high, opposing a wooden countenance to all his advances. It was an antipathy justified by the vile and base character of Mohammed. He had always been protected by Soliman, who had appointed him to Jaffa. Some months later, the Pacha of Tripoli being dead, Soliman demanded this dignity for his favourite. The Grand Vizier received at the same time a despatch from Mohammed, who demanded the place occupied by Soliman, who, he wrote, was "incapable, old and an invalid." The Vizier contented himself by sending this letter to Soliman, with these words : "That is the man for whom you demand the title of pacha with two tails !"

What a departure ! The Governor of Jaffa and his suite, the Capugi Bachi and his officers, Mr. Catafago (carried off on his way from Acre), Malim Musa (who had just arrived), Damiani, the doctor, Beaudin, the dragomans, the interpreters, the cooks ! An escort of a hundred dark-faced Hawarys horsemen. Lady Hester, in a palanquin of crimson velvet drawn by two white mules, preceded by her mare and her donkeys, saddled and ready for her to mount, if she showed the desire to do so. The army of camels vanishing beneath the picks, the mattocks, the spades, the wheelbarrows, the ropes with which they were laden ; the crowd of water-carriers and torch-bearers. The twenty sumptuous tents given by Soliman, one particularly of magnificent dimensions, of a green colour, ornamented by chimeras and yellow stars, double like the calix and the corolla of a flower turned upside down, attracted the attention of all. It was the tent which the Princess of Wales will render famous and which was to play an important part at the time of that scandalous trial of 1820, in which George IV—very far, however, from having a stainless private life !—will have the impudence to come to parade all these stories of the alcove and to make march past all that rabble of hired witnesses : Swiss, Germans, Italians particularly, for the simple pleasure of being disembarassed of his wife !

Three messengers galloped in advance of the caravan. The inhabitants of the villages were turned out to leave the place for her. The Moslem governors bent under the will of a woman in a fanatical country. Ah ! truly she was able to cry, five years later, in recalling this journey :

“ The wife of that poor King (George IV) came to Syria to pass as an obscure Englishwoman, while Lady Hester played there the part which the Princess of Wales ought never to have abandoned ! ”

The green and blue tents rose amongst the stones and took by assault the ruins of Ascalon. They were extremely comfortable, and nowhere in Syria had the doctor found better fare. On April 3, 1815, the hundred peasants who had been requisitioned in the environs began the work of excavation to the south of the mosque. The first blows of the mattock brought to light earthenware and fragments of a column of no interest. On the 4th, the picks met with a resistance, and a magnificent statue of mutilated marble was gently drawn out. It was the body of a warrior of colossal dimensions, measuring six feet nine inches from shoulder to heel, and of a very beautiful shape. The doctor will conjecture that it belonged to the Herodean epoch, and the head of Medusa which ornamented the chest induced him to think that he was in the presence of a deified king. The next day cisterns

were discovered. Finally, on the 8th, great excitement ! Two stone angels cemented by four columns of grey granite were unearthed. Surely the treasure was within ! Labour in vain, hopes deceived ; they were empty, completely empty !

The doctor, to console Lady Hester, spoke words of comfort to her.

“ In the eyes of lovers of Art,” said he, “ all the treasures of the world are not worth your statue. Later on, visitors to Ascalon will stand in astonishment before the remains of antiquity snatched from the past by a woman.”

But Lady Hester, whose unexpected actions were continually disconcerting those who believed that they knew her best, answered coldly :

“ That is perhaps true, but it is my intention to break this statue into a thousand pieces and to throw it into the sea, just to avoid such a report being spread, and that I may not lose at the Porte the merit of my disinterestedness.”

And this was done, despite all the murmurs and all the protestations. The ruins, starting from that moment, seemed to avenge themselves for this act of savage vandalism, and the workmen found nothing more ; they laughed in their sleeves. The check was complete. The site indicated had been excavated and re-excavated. Lady Hester consoled herself by the thought that Djeddar Pacha had anticipated her,

under the pretext of seeking materials for his mosque. She accepted the defeat, but she did not admit as victor anyone except the Red Pacha, the only adversary worthy of her.

What was harder, was that England refused to know anything. The expenses remained charged to Lady Hester. It is true that she wrote at that time letters like this :

“ Since I well knew that it [the statue] would be admired by English travellers, I gave orders for it to be broken to bits, in order that malicious tongues might not proceed to relate that I am searching for statues for my countrymen, and not for treasures for the Sultan.”

It would discourage, at any rate, people better disposed !

Lady Hester, grumbling the while, got out of the difficulty of the Ascalon expenses by the aid of economy. At that moment, she boasted of not having a debt.

CHAPTER X

IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE ASSASSINS

T IRED in body and irritated in mind, Lady Hester revived at Mar-Elias. At that moment, Pierre Ruffin, French chargé d'affaires at Constantinople, an intimate friend of the amiable Pouqueville, had his eye on the Englishwoman and warned Caulaincourt, whom he supposed to be still Minister for Foreign Affairs, that definitely settled in Syria, "whose climate sympathised better with her frail health, the illustrious traveller had received from Great Britain presents to distribute to the local authorities of the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon, under the ostensible motive of her personal gratitude for the courtesies which they had lavished upon her." Was he in ignorance, then, that England had refused to share in the Ascalon expenses ?

Sometimes, she dreamed of forming an association of men of letters, artists and savants which she would invite to travel all over the Orient under her auspices. She aimed at founding an Institute, on the model of that which Bonaparte had carried away to Egypt, and of which she

would naturally be the head. Leaving the women to groan and sigh at the doors of the Academies, she was leaping the barrier of ancient customs and traditional manners and creating on her own level. Sometimes, she discussed the expediency of a journey in Abyssinia. Sometimes, she drew up memoirs on the marvellous properties of bezoar in the cases of the plague and mania. From time to time, she cast a glance towards that Europe from which she had fled without regrets. Sharply, she judged her fellow-countrymen, stigmatised emphatically the English statesmen as "senseless boobies whom their ignorance and their duplicity have exposed, not only to the laughter, but to the maledictions of generations present and to come," traced of the Restoration a picture engraved by a master hand and denounced the English policy against France, a policy of which she unmasked the faults with a singular perspicacity and an impartial violence.

"Cease to trouble yourself in regard to me," she was to write on April 22, 1816, to the Marquis of Buckingham. "I shall never return to Europe, even if I were reduced to beg my bread here. Once only I shall go to France to see you, James and you ; but I shall go to Provence, not to Paris, for the sight of our odious Ministers running about everywhere to do evil, would make my gorge rise too much. I shall not be

martyr for nothing. The granddaughter of Lord Chatham, the niece of the illustrious Pitt, *feels herself blush at being English*. What disgrace to be born in that country which has made of its cursed gold the counterpoise of justice, which has placed humanity in fetters—that country which has employed valiant troops, intended to defend its national honour, as an instrument of vengeance to oppress a free people, which has exposed to ridicule and humiliation a monarch who might have gained the hearts of his subjects, if the English intriguers had left him alone to reign or abdicate.

“You tell me that the French army—the bravest in the world, that which has made more sacrifices for its national honour than no matter what other—would not listen to the voice of reason; and you think that I should believe it! Never! If a woman, poor and miserable like myself, has produced a very strong impression on thousands of savage Arabs, as I have done, without even bearing the name of chief, simply by surrendering to some of their prejudices and in inspiring in them confidence in her sincerity and in the purity of her intentions, is not, then, a king—a legitimate king—able to bring this army, to which he owes his crown, to a just appreciation of its duty? Undoubtedly, he would have been able to do it and would have done it, if he had been free to act. What ought

one to expect from men who, during twenty-five years, have been their most bitter enemies, except what has happened ?

“ You may be disgusted ; I care for that not more than a penny ; for there is no soul on earth who has had, or will ever have, any influence on my thoughts and actions.”

She maintained also a connected correspondence with all the people who knew how to hold a pen. Beaudin galloped across mountains and valleys. It was no sinecure that of being her secretary ! One day, sent on a mission to St. Jean d’Acre, he slept in a mill in the environs of Tyre with, he declared, his head on his luggage and his horse’s bridle in his hand. Nevertheless, in the morning, the horse had disappeared. Painfully he continued his journey, and received on the way a laconic letter from Lady Hester : “ If you have lost your mare, find her.”

In this eddying of eccentric ideas, the doctor did not see any trace of projects favourable to a return to Europe. Six years of peregrinations across the East had surfeited his taste for travel, and six years of solitude—solitude mitigated, it is true, by the passing of foreigners of distinction—with even a superior woman, had made him hungry for social life and worldly pleasures. Being circumspect, he ventured lightly on the burning ground of a probable return. Lady Hester loved the unexpected ; she listened, smiled,

approved and sent dare-dare Giorgio to find a medical man in England willing to come to her. She even gave the doctor permission to make a tour in Egypt. He passed two months there and met Sheik Ibrahim Burckhardt. At Alexandria, his joy exploded noisily in regard to the splendid parties and evening conversaziones, and that without the least remorse. Had he not left at Mar-Elias a substitute doctor worthy of all confidence, a certain Signor Volpi. This Italian, formerly in Holy Orders, had taken advantage of the Revolution to throw off the cowl and to dance with enthusiasm round the tree of Liberty. This occupation not being sufficiently lucrative, he embarked for Syria, having taken care to provide himself with a syringe and a sugar-loaf hat, these insignia being necessary to be well received. Lady Hester often appealed to his judgments on humanity in general.

The calm in which the doctor was delighting was abruptly broken so soon as he returned from Egypt by one of those storms so heavy with threats in which the caprices of Lady Hester excelled.

From Tripoli to Antioch, between the Orontes and the sea, there runs a chain of ragged and gloomy mountains, the Ansaries Mountains. Bald rocks, dark and musty ravines, fallen ground retained by stunted trees twisting themselves into an eternal spasm, chaos and ruins. To

these wild and enigmatical landscapes, which are covered by miasmas risen from the marshes and the ponds, from corpses of men and animals which decompose side by side, chosen inhabitants are necessary. In the Ansaries Mountains lived the *Assassins* (Hashishim)! The Assassins! Obscure association, vast freemasonry, surrounded by the hatred of all peoples, both Christians and Moslems, seeking the ruin of Islam, mysterious sect which mingles, in blood and poison, the most ascetic mysticism, the most ridiculous charlatanism and the most implacable cruelty.

Ah! how the recollections of history haunt those deep gorges which gash and wound the earth and furrow it with wounds, the lips of which seems to draw together the better to preserve their terrible secret!

It is in these narrow valleys, where the light creeps in like a spectre; amidst these lofty crags which time carries away joyously by scraps, that the fierce mountaineers so feared by the troops of the Sultan are entrenched. They are tributaries of the Pachas of Tripoli and Damascus, but their obedience is uncertain, and no collector of taxes dares to get himself involved on their great tracks which end often in a cul-de-sac. Misfortune follows the imprudent person who would venture into the mountain! From castles encamped on the edge of abysses death would

descend. And not the violent and honourable death which a combat, even an unequal one, gives, but the unforeseen, insidious death which slowly scents the victim, watches him unweariedly and awaits him in the perfume of a poisoned nosegay, in the clear water of a contaminated spring, in the most impressive cares of a servant who has sold himself. Kalaat Masjaf! Kalaat Quadinous! Kalaat el Kaf! eagles' nests hewn in the living rock, which have an ugly appearance and a sinister memory, lair of bandits where lived, meditated and died that strange Rachid-eddin-Sinan, the Old Man of the Mountain, who brought from Persia the doctrine of blood and of crime, inspirer of souls, who fanaticised his men up to the love of, the adoration of, death, awakening their energies and casting a spell over their wills up to the most degraded and the most humiliating passivity.

At a distance of seven centuries, the Assassins had not disarmed, and each day brought a new incident to add to their monotonous and sanguinary chronicles. Nevertheless, it was them whom Lady Hester was going to defy, them who had everywhere secret affiliations, everywhere spies, them who knew everything, avenged themselves always and so much the more dangerously that they were totally indifferent to their own lives and considered as an ineffable happiness to die for their cause.

The reason Lady Hester had was a grave one : in the nineteenth century a European traveller could disappear in the Ansaries Mountains without anyone being called to account.

On March 28, 1814, a Frenchman arrived at Sidon and lodged with his consul, M. Taitbout. He was Colonel Boutin, a great friend of Moreau and a very distinguished officer of engineers, who had received the delicate mission of preparing and sounding the ground in the East. Lady Hester had met him at Cairo, and during a dinner party she had turned into ridicule the mysterious air which he affected and had laughingly denounced him as a spy of Bonaparte. One remembers the frightful epidemic of plague in the spring of 1814. In vain Colonel Boutin's friends endeavoured to keep him at Sidon, but he was in a hurry and he left on April 6, leaving as a deposit in trust at Mar-Elias some of his manuscripts. Lady Hester had given him one of her servants, a sure guide and well acquainted with the regions the traveller was to pass through ; but unhappily he was carried off by the plague. Colonel Boutin quitted Hama for Latakia. He had informed M. Guys, consul at that town, that he would abandon the ordinary route, which ran northwards so far as Djesrech Chogh, to cut across the Ansaries Mountains. He started—and no one had ever heard of him since.

M. Guys awaited him at first patiently ; then

he became alarmed. The report of his disappearance reached Lady Hester. She thought that the pachas were going to institute a rigorous inquiry, but the pachas feared too much the famous Assassins to raise a little finger in favour of a foreigner so foolish as to throw himself voluntarily into the wolf's mouth. The months passed. Then Lady Hester made up her mind abruptly. In the East, all travellers are brothers ; differences of race and national enmities are abolished. She took in hand the case of Colonel Boutin, whom personally she held, besides, in high esteem. The affair was going all at once to rebound and drag from their tranquillity the unpunished murderers.

In haste, she drew up her plans. An inquiry, in the rotten heart of the Ansaries country, was difficult, impossible. A silence of a year had thickened the mystery. No matter, it would be necessary for her to bring the affair to a head, and she will bring it to a head. All the blood of the Pitts was boiling in this woman, who had truly received from Heaven the gift of command. She chose three men who possessed her confidence : Signor Volpi was sent to Hama. Soliman, a bold and resolute Druse muleteer, and Pierre, recalled from Deiv el Kammar, where he was keeping an inn, started to repeat Colonel Boutin's journey, disguised as old pedlars. They succeeded in their mission, and in October, 1815,

when the doctor disembarked from Egypt, he learned that the proofs which had been collected were conclusive, and that the pacha was to be summoned to act. The doctor made the mistake of not being enthusiastic and of talking of revenge, of danger in the future when Lady Hester went riding. Let him not speak in that manner ; she will do without him !

She wrote to Soliman pressing letters. The pacha, who was by no means anxious to irritate the Assassins, answered courteously, but evasively, that the troops would not be able to endure a winter campaign in the Ansaries Mountains, but in the spring he would do all that was possible to meet her wishes. Like the fleet sloughis which roll themselves up before relaxing their iron muscles and springing forward, Lady Hester paused to anchor her resolution for ever ; then, in a flash, she launched herself towards the goal, but without deigning to cast a glance at the dangers which rose at each step in advance.

The spring blossomed again ; Soliman made no move. Lady Hester judged it prudent to refresh his memory, and set out for St. Jean d'Acre with all her servants, covered with armour and costly apparel. To strike the Oriental imagination and convey a lofty idea of her rank and her power, she displayed all the luxury which her resources permitted her. She went straight to Soliman's

palace, caused the doors to be opened to her, and made her way so far as the council-chamber where the pacha sat.

She penetrated the crowd, called for silence, explained publicly what had brought her and demanded vengeance. Soliman, astonished, but immovable, lavished compliments and presents upon her. She treated them with contempt, and tried the effects of flying into a great passion, the more redoubtable, inasmuch as she had intended and prepared it, and withdrew, in the midst of general consternation, threatening the pacha with the anger of the Sultan.

Mr. Catafago, the Austrian consul, had offered her his house. Next day Soliman sent to ask her to wait upon him; she refused. As, at the same time, the French authorities at Constantinople began to make a stir, the pacha decided that it was better to allow his hand to be forced. Lady Hester had gained the day.

But there was no question of a simple military promenade. The struggle would be a fierce one, and trained soldiers and an experienced leader were required. Soliman withdrew all the garrison of his pachalik and gave the command to Mustapha Barbar, the energetic Governor of Tripoli. Lady Hester, who followed with increasing interest the mobilisation of the troops, of "her troops," sent him a pair of magnificent English pistols.

“ I arm thee, my knight,” she wrote. “ I have reason to complain of the Ansaries, who have massacred one of my brothers. I hope that these pistols will never fail anyone, that they will protect thy days and will avenge the cause of thy friend.”

The choice of Mustapha Barbar was excellent. A brave general and a rigid Mohammedan of sincere conviction, he hated the Assassins with all his soul. He made vibrate amongst his soldiers the religious cord always so dangerous to touch in the East. In a state of religious exaltation, they set out for a holy war, and nothing was to stop them in their work of destruction. No quarter, no mercy. To slay an Assassin was to glorify the Prophet.

The enemy lay in ambush everywhere. Every rock concealed an assailant. Every abyss enticed death. It was necessary to carry the mountain piece by piece, tree by tree, house by house. Booty and blood rendered the fanaticism of the Turks the more violent. The old men and children who fell into their clutches were pitilessly massacred, the women sold as slaves. As for the prisoners, there was none of them.

The mountaineers, surrounded in their lairs, cut off in their last fortresses, perceived with horror that the fierce renown of the Ansaries was crumbling away. Mustapha Barbar ventured to attack one of those savage fortresses at

the Kalaat el Kaf, which stood out like a defiance on a cluster of sharp-pointed rocks. Jealously the mountain concealed it, surrounded it, fondled it. For it, it sharpened its broken stones, it made denser its thickets. For it, it multiplied its traps, its slippery burrows, its deep ravines, its treacherous marches. All that Nature could invent to oppose to the march of man, she had lavished in its defiles. Three torrents defended the approach to it, and their beds were deadly and their high banks precipitous.

Nevertheless, Mustapha Barbar, in traversing the bottom of the valley where the foot sank as in a pulp of slimy and poisonous toad-stools, evoked the clear-skinned and blonde Englishwoman, his lady. He took the fortress; he destroyed it from top to bottom and razed its ramparts. He violated the sacred tombs of the Assassins, throwing into the torrents the ashes of the Imans. It is then that the Tartar, bearer of the heads of the vanquished which had been despatched to Constantinople, returned in all haste with an order to put a stop to the butchery. Fifty-two villages burned. Three hundred Assassins massacred. . . . Lady Hester had been well avenged of Colonel Boutin !

An illustrious traveller, Maurice Barrès, was, a century later, in the course of that marvellous *Enquête aux pays du Levant*, wherein are resuscitated all the "obscure life," all the "religious

heart of Asia," to penetrate in his turn into the depths of the Ansaries Mountains. He looked for traces of Lady Hester, and he passed over the ruins of the Kalaat el Kaf without knowing their tragic secret.

People murmured, afterwards, that the true authors of the crime had escaped; they were too powerful to be reached. No matter, the innocent had paid for the guilty. It was a form of Turkish justice of which Soliman rarely gave the example during his reign. Moreover, Lady Hester thanked him with that matchless grace which she knew how to display when she was pleased.

France did not forget the part which the noble Englishwoman had taken in the affair of Colonel Boutin. After a speech from the Comte Delaborde, the Chamber of Deputies addressed to her its thanks, and assured her of the gratitude of the country. The *Courrier français* devoted to her, in an article on Colonel Boutin, some moving lines :

"Colonel Boutin was splendidly received by Pitt's niece, Lady Hester Stanhope. Proud of her protection, he was on the point of succeeding in his mission when he was assassinated by the Arabs. . . . France knows how the murder of this illustrious traveller was avenged by her ladyship, who, by her influence alone and her personal efforts, demanded and obtained the

heads of the assassins and the restoration of the luggage of the unfortunate officer."

Shortly after the Ansaries Mountains Expedition, the Princess of Wales arrived in Syria. Lady Hester had no kind of sympathy for her. Faugh! a woman so common, so vulgar, who exhibited herself like an Opera girl and fastened her garter below her knee, how detestable! In the famous quarrels which moved all England she had taken the side neither of the Prince of Wales, a dishonourable rake, nor of Princess Caroline, an impudent and slovenly German! Moreover, she judged it prudent, besides, to stay in the country for some time; the more so that the princess would undoubtedly have paid her a visit out of curiosity, and the expense of receiving her would have been very heavy. She embarked, therefore, on July 18, 1816. For where? No one in the world, save herself, would have had this idea. She went to take refuge in the midst of that very people whom she had just caused to be punished so cruelly. On the way, she bestowed her congratulations upon Mustapha Barbar at Tripoli. She disembarked at the little port of Bussyl, mounted a donkey and arrived at Antioch. Mr. Barker, who came to talk of her affairs, only remained with her a short time. She lived altogether alone, with some cowardly servants, in an abandoned house in the neighbourhood of An-

tioch. Absolute solitude. Superior people have regarded this attitude as comedy. It was a comedy which lasted seventy days, and might, at any moment, have had death as its epilogue! Who is the actor so stout of heart as to play it up to the end before empty benches?

Can the life of Lady Hester be imagined? The people of the country, by way of encouragement, made to dance around her all the victims of the Assassins. Round of honour in which hundreds who had been poisoned, stabbed, hanged, flayed, strangled, gave each other fraternally the hand. Well-intentioned friends warned her every morning that her life was in danger. As for her, she continued her long rides across the mountain. Sometimes, she halted in a hamlet, assembled the peasants, and informed them, if they did not yet know, that she was the Syt who had caused their relatives to be massacred and their villages to be burned. Then she made them a very impressive speech, telling them that she had avenged the death of a Frenchman, of an enemy of her country, because the cowardly murder of a traveller is an abominable deed which all noble hearts ought to condemn.

Then, it was the silence of the warm nights, the passing of the breeze which refreshed the gardens, the plaintive cry of some jackals quite close at hand. Nevertheless, not a hair fell from

her head. The Englishwoman had conquered. The Assassins, astonished at meeting in a woman a contempt for death equal to their own, decided that to respect this life to which she seemed to attach no value would be for them a superior vengeance. They proved themselves, in this case, very profound philosophers. What a magnificent fate, in fact, would have been that of Lady Hester, "the Arab Amazon," according to Barbey d'Aurevilly, "who rode at the gallop out of European civilisation and English routine—that old circus where you turn in a ring—to reanimate her sensations in the peril and independence of the desert," if she had ended in blood in the mountains of the Assassins! She would have disappeared like a brilliant meteor, in the midst of her glory, in the midst of her fortune, leaving behind a trail of heroic legends. She would have escaped the slow agony of Djoun, where, overwhelmed by old age, oblivion and ill-health, she straightened her tall figure to make head against the pack of creditors and Jewish usurers, more filthy in Syria than anywhere else.

At the end of September, Lady Hester returned to Mar-Elias, unharmed. The Princess of Wales had concluded her lamentable journey in the Holy Land, dragging with her that Italian courier Bergami, whom she had bombarded in quick succession with the titles of Baron della

Francina, Knight of Malta and Knight of the Holy Sepulchre, and whom she had just appointed at Jerusalem Grand Master of St. Caroline, an order which she had created expressly for him, without taking into consideration the impropriety of her action.

Miss Williams and the doctor awaited Lady Hester anxiously. For Miss Williams had disembarked in Syria in March, 1816. Her attachment to her patroness was so great that she could not make up her mind to remain at a distance from her, and, after passing some years at Malta, she had left her sister and had, despite every difficulty—tempest, sea-sickness, mutiny of the crew and a passage of three and a half months—come to rejoin her. Lady Hester's lady's-maid, Ann Fry, awaited Miss Williams when she left the vessel, in order to veil her and to inculcate her with the first instructions relative to the new life. Such was Lady Hester's response to her devotion!

Amongst the visitors to Mar-Elias during that last year, the least commonplace was without question that young Mr. W. J. Bankes, who arrived full of stupid confidence in himself and with a conquering air. Lady Hester received him very amicably, and, learning that it was his intention to go to Palmyra, she gave him letters of recommendation to Muly Ishmael of Hama and to Nasr, son of the Emir of the Anezes. She

also offered him old Pierre, who was always brought to the front when it was a question of choosing an experienced guide.

The young man, reckoning on his own resources which he considered abundantly sufficient to get him through the affair, had accepted against his will the letters and old Pierre. Besides, Lady Hester had allowed an imprudent speech to escape, which had not fallen on the ear of a deaf man.

“When I was in the desert,” said she, “I arranged with Nasr to give to travellers whom I should protect a letter of safe-conduct which, alone, should be of value; those who were recommended by me verbally were not to be listened to. They will be divided into two classes: ordinary travellers and travellers of distinction in whom the Bedouins will be able to trust as in myself, who will have the right to full hospitality, to mimic combats, to camel’s meat. To recognise them easily, the letters of the first will bear a single seal, the second will bear two.

Bankes had nothing more urgent than to open Lady Hester’s letter and to make himself acquainted with the contents. When he learned that he was placed in the class of ordinary travellers, that he had received only one seal, and that he was not mentioned either as prince or gentleman, he was disgusted. Ah! ah! this old sorceress imagined that she held the desert

routes ; she was going to see how he would dispense with her. And the young man, abandoning the letters and old Pierre at Hama, started proudly on the way, under the protection of the Pacha of Damascus.

The return was less brilliant ! Stopped by Nasr at Mount Belaz, and having refused to pay for the right to pass, he had been courteously conducted back to Hama. Sticking to his resolution, like an Englishman who is on the point of losing a wager or whose vanity is at stake, he took a second time the road to Palmyra. This time he paid without complaint the 1100 piastres demanded by Nasr. But scarcely had he arrived at Palmyra, than another son of Mehannah demanded the same sum. Incensed, Bankes refused to understand anything, and was thrown into prison. On his return to England, he placed all his misadventures to the account of Lady Hester, proclaiming everywhere that she took a malicious pleasure in closing the gates of the desert to travellers. It is thus that History is written.

In the company of M. Regnault, French consul at Tripoli, a little man, ugly and hunch-backed, but remarkably pleasant and intelligent, who passed some time at Mar-Elias, Lady Hester visited the French consulate at Sidon. The new consul, M. Rufin, was the son of the chargé d'affaires at Constantinople. And the crowd gave Lady Hester an enthusiastic reception.

Everyone wanted to see this extraordinary woman who had raised an entire province to avenge on the Ansaries the assassination of a Frenchman.

On October 28, Didot, son of the celebrated printer of Paris, passed through Sidon and was invited to go up to the convent. Finding himself in the presence of two Orientals squatting on a divan, he recognised Lady Hester by her beardless face and Regnault by his hump. Lady Hester did not ask him to issue a new edition of her travels, divining well that, contrary to the habits of printers, Didot would give her a great publicity. And he did not fail to add a zero to the 3000 piastres which the expedition to Palmyra had cost.

On November 15, Giorgio brought back the surgeon N——, Dr. Meryon's successor. The twenty-seven trunks which he had brought were landed without examination on the part of the Custom House, mark of consideration from which it never departed throughout Lady Hester's residence in Syria.

Giorgio affected a profound dislike of England. The Duke of York was his intimate friend, and Princess Charlotte of Wales had sent him a *silver* chain. "I shall certainly wear it," said he, "but I shall not say whence it comes, in order not to give the Turks so pitiful an idea of English hospitality." One thing only had struck him: there were no fleas and the people did not tell

lies. Having seen at Chevening a portrait of Chatham, he told Lady Hester that her face bore an astonishing resemblance to that of her grandfather, which overwhelmed her with pleasure.

Then Dr. Meryon thought of departing. He was affected in taking leave of Lady Hester, but excellent provision for the journey, gazelle-pie, tarts and cold fowls—delicate attention on the part of Miss Williams—soon restored his equanimity.

He embarked on January 21, 1817, believing certainly that he would never return. Ah! assuredly he had desired this hour with all his soul, but one does not leave a woman like Lady Hester without regrets. He had just closed a dazzling page of his life. The mauve terraces of Bairout sprawling at the foot of Lebanon were vanishing in the rays of the setting sun. Ah! would he ever be able to forget the marches into the desert at the head of the Arab tribes; and the assistance exacted by the governors of Syria to open the earth and to snatch its treasures from it; and the troops launched into the inaccessible defiles to avenge the disappearance of a traveller?

The East leaves in the heart a perfume of dead roses, which is quite sufficient to transform into a posy of recollections set with pearls the incidents of travel. . . . It is sometimes a flash of vivid

sunlight on a load of oranges, sometimes a burst of laughter from a brown and dirty child, sometimes the dust of roads in summer, sometimes the peppery odour which the spice-merchants exhale. . . .

THE END

